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OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 256**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1994–95

House of Commons

Monday 6 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr. Meacher: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order come after Question Time; otherwise they take time away from hon. Members who have questions on the Order Paper.

TRANSPORT

European Rail Link

1. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to ensure that the United Kingdom north of London is connected by rail to Europe.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): Channel tunnel freight services from north of London have been operating since last June. Last October I instructed Railtrack to ensure that the infrastructure needed for the passenger services is ready for the start of 1996.

Mr. MacShane: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that unilluminating reply. He will know that Yorkshire is to be provided with one single passenger train per day, compared with the several that flow from London. When will Yorkshire and the north of England get the same treatment as the regions of France and Germany, where a public service rail network is being created to plug the regions into the Euro-network? When will there be a Government policy to serve the regions, especially the north, by linking them to the rest of Europe?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman will find that only in this country is there to be a non-stop service from north of the capital, or beyond the capital, through the tunnel.

Mr. Hendry: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the announcement by Eurostar last week that it intends significantly to extend the number of British cities that will have through services directly to Paris? Will it not be magnificent to be able to go to sleep in Manchester and wake up in Paris—and, even better, to be able to go to sleep in Paris and wake up in Manchester?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am glad that my hon. Friend added that last comment. I certainly welcome the continued expansion of services through the tunnel; it is one of the great success stories. It will transform both passenger and freight services. I hope that that can be common ground across the House.

Mr. Tyler: Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to accept that confidence in the channel tunnel service is still fragile and that traffic from all parts of the United Kingdom is still dependent on that confidence being reinvigorated and assured? In the light of recent disclosures, is he prepared to add to his exchanges and correspondence with me on the issues of fire safety and evacuation procedures in the tunnel?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman needs to make up his mind—either he wants to build confidence or he wants to raise scare stories, which have the effect of undermining confidence. He knows as well as I do that there are well-tested and well-developed policies for dealing with emergencies in the tunnel, and they work.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Further to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), will my right hon. Friend also welcome the announcement by

Eurostar of the overnight service from Glasgow to Paris, which will stop in Preston and so serve my constituents well? Will he further welcome the announcement of the £150 million investment in rolling stock, which will be an added bonus for my constituents?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The development of the night services, the development of north of London services and the development of the freight services—in addition to the services from London—across the channel are all good news. They are good news for the constituents of a number of hon. Members, but most of all they are good news for passengers, for business and industry and for United Kingdom plc.

Mr. Meacher: Having been a decade behind the French in building a high-speed rail link to the channel tunnel and two decades behind them in building a TGV network, why are the Government now being so slow in preparing a specifically high-speed rail link from London through the heart of Britain to Scotland and Ireland? Why have not the Government yet even set out their plans for upgrading the rail freight routes from the regions to the continent to the larger continental freight gauge standards to provide the capability for lorry piggy-back services, which would cost as little as £70 million—one tenth of what the Government have already frittered away on the preparation for privatisation?

Dr. Mawhinney: First, on the hon. Gentleman's last point, he is precisely wrong. The Labour party continues to pluck figures out of the air and believes that, if it keeps repeating erroneous figures frequently enough—

Mr. Meacher: They are the Government's figures.

Dr. Mawhinney: They are not our figures, as the hon. Gentleman will shortly find out in an answer to a question by one of his hon. Friends. I am glad—no, I am not: I am sorry—that the general support for the tunnel, which has been evinced by hon. Members on both sides of the House, has not broken through the hon. Gentleman's normal doom and gloom. This is a success story. The private sector will develop it even further. Everyone bar the hon. Gentleman is supportive.

London Transport (Ticketing)

2. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with London Transport on future ticketing arrangements.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): Ticketing arrangements are generally an operational matter for London Transport, but I discuss developments with the chairman and others from time to time.

Mr. Corbyn: In response to that rather blank reply, will the Minister confirm or deny reports that the travelcard will be either made into a smart electronic card, or phased out in favour of a unit ticketing arrangement, whereby people will be able to travel only on a season ticket, with clipping-off for each journey that they undertake? That will vastly increase the cost of transport in London, which is already the most expensive public transport in Europe.

Mr. Norris: Deny.

Sir Michael Neubert: When my hon. Friend discusses ticketing arrangements with London Transport, will he press on it the principle of having through ticketing on a River Thames passenger service, because a travelcard facility will be essential to the success of such a service, which we hope will be established before not too long?

Mr. Norris: I welcome my hon. Friend's constructive intervention on the subject of the travelcard, which is an essential part of the framework of public transport services in London. There is no question about its continued survival. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that the issue of integrating a river service into the travelcard raises a number of issues, and that I am not able to give him an outright assurance to that effect today. We are always willing, however, to consider propositions for the promotion of river services on the Thames. If such a proposition were put to me, I would be happy to discuss it.

Cyclists

3. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take further steps to improve the safety of cyclists.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): Fatalities to cyclists are at their lowest level since records began in 1927. We shall seek to continue the improvement by means of education, publicity, research and advice to local authorities on cycling matters.

Mr. French: Does my hon. Friend agree that, where accidents do take place, one of the most frequent causes is the failure to show a clearly visible light when cycling at night-time? Is he aware that a number of police authorities strongly recommend that bicycles should be fitted with integral lighting systems at the point of manufacture? That would overcome the problem of lights failing through faulty batteries. Will he seriously consider making that a mandatory requirement when cycles are manufactured?

Mr. Watts: I shall certainly consider my hon. Friend's suggestion, but I remind him that it is an obligation for cyclists to show lights when travelling at night, and that it is clearly in their interests to be responsible in the way that they use roads.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that, in the 1930s when we had mass unemployment on the scale that we have today, it was decided that one of the ways to provide work was to build cycle routes in many parts of Britain? That was true in north Derbyshire, where many of the miners were not in work. To some extent, it helped to mop up unemployment. Why do not the Government start such a scheme throughout Britain today?

Mr. Watts: This year, £3 million has been made available for a 1,000-mile cycle network in London which, it is estimated, will reduce casualties by 25 per cent. The Department is extremely supportive of the development of cycling. My right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State visited Holland earlier this year to look at cycling policy and the lessons that can be learnt from there.

Traffic Improvements

4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further assistance he is giving local authorities to improve parking and traffic flow arrangements in their areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: We encourage local authorities to include appropriate traffic management measures in their transport policies and programmes which form the basis for the allocation of transport supplementary grant.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Ealing, we greatly regret the devolution to Labour-controlled Ealing council of powers to control parking and other measures related to that, because we have continuing inadequate parking provision? People are parking where they should not park and the council does not deal with the matter to the satisfaction of the residents. Will my hon. Friend do something about Ealing council? Will he wake it up on this matter or will he bring back the police to control this important part of people's lives?

Mr. Watts: De-criminalising parking enforcement and the new powers available to local authorities enable them to match their enforcement priorities to local needs. My hon. Friend draws attention to the poor performance of a particular Labour-controlled authority. I have no doubt that he will continue to draw attention to its shortcomings and that he will encourage his constituents to seek their remedy the next time the council faces the electorate at the ballot box.

Mr. Fraser: Is not it a fact that in central London at any rate, increased parking simply increases traffic flow? We need more pedestrian areas, of which we are lamentably short in central London compared with the provision available in almost any other major city in Europe.

Mr. Watts: The powers available to local authorities enable them to make sensible and balanced judgments about the priorities between parking, parking enforcement and the important aspect of facilities for pedestrians—the non-motorised form of transport.

Supplementary Grant

5. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the level of transport supplementary grant approved for North Yorkshire for 1995–96.

Mr. Watts: Three of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale, have made representations about the level of TSG approved for North Yorkshire county council for 1995–96.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware of the concern at county hall and among the district councils about the need to strengthen and repair many of North Yorkshire's bridges? He will know that it is England's biggest and most rural county. It is all very well to concentrate on national priority routes for bridge strengthening, but if many of these bridges have to have weight restrictions or closure, there will be detours of many miles. In the moors and dales, there are some access-only roads where there are important bridges. Will my hon. Friend bear all that in mind and will he ensure that North Yorkshire gets a much better settlement in future years?

Mr. Watts: As always, my hon. Friend is assiduous in pressing the claims of his constituents and of his county. The bad news, to which he draws attention, is that in the allocation for 1995–96, the provision for bridge strengthening and assessment in North Yorkshire has been reduced by 15.5 per cent. compared with 14.5 per cent. nationally. The good news, which my hon. Friend and his county have overlooked, is that in the current year, the allocation for bridge strengthening has more than doubled—an increase of 102 per cent. We recognise that canny Yorkshiremen seek to get the best they can. However, an increase of 102 per cent. followed by a reduction of 15.5 per cent. should lead my hon. Friend to conclude that North Yorkshire has not been treated terribly unfairly.

Women Passengers (Safety)

6. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve the safety provisions for women on London Transport.

9. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to assess the specific needs of women with regard to public transport.

Mr. Norris: Identifying and meeting the specific needs of women passengers is a priority for my Department. Key issues are personal safety and physical access in terms of the design and planning of transport systems.

Mr. Banks: We all know that the Minister does not like travelling with weirdos on public transport in London, although he has no great problem about sitting with them on the Front Bench. Is he aware that many women in London find travelling on the underground and on buses physically threatening? The latest opinion poll has shown that 73 per cent. of women questioned felt that staffing and safety were big issues in terms of their travelling decisions. In view of the fact that it is International Women's Week, can we have a series of initiatives aimed positively at making travel for women much safer and more comfortable?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is very good at sniping from the Back Benches, but remarkably short of any actual good ideas. The reality is that crime on London Underground has fallen for six years in succession. That extraordinarily good achievement has been brought about because London Transport takes the issue seriously and recognises that many passengers feel vulnerable, particularly if they have to travel on a relatively isolated part of the system. It has therefore recognised that special needs must be met. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the help points that have been installed throughout the system and the other safety measures that have been introduced. They are all designed to try to reassure passengers that they are significantly safer travelling on the underground—as indeed they are—than they are in any other normal environment.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Although the Minister continues to promote the convenience of the private motor

car, he must be aware that the needs of public transport users, particularly women, go largely unmet. I wonder whether he would like to ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to join me in a journey across either Peterborough or Cambridge with two children, a push chair and a heavy bag of shopping. He would then see how difficult it is for many women who use public transport.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Lady cannot have it both ways: either she agrees with me or she does not. She seemed to suggest that she did not agree with me, but promptly went on to demonstrate that she did agree with me. The points that the hon. Lady has made are perfectly straightforward; that is why we are looking, for example, at introducing low floor buses, to ensure that buses are accessible not just to disabled people, but people travelling with young children or heavy bags of shopping. The measures are designed to make the transport system more efficient, effective and accessible both to vulnerable passengers and passengers generally.

Mr. John Marshall: Can my hon. Friend confirm that there has been a reduction of no less than 40 per cent. in the number of violent crimes committed on London Underground in the past five years? Does he expect the safety and comfort of passengers to benefit from the investment in new trains on the Northern line and from the extension of the Jubilee line?

Mr. Norris: I guarantee to my hon. Friend that, tomorrow, none of his comments will appear in any report of our proceedings despite the fact that they represent the kernel of the matter: the system is significantly safer than it has been for years. My hon. Friend is right to say that the new train stock to be deployed on the Northern line will offer us further opportunities to make the system even more secure and reliable in the future.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend accept that the safety of women travelling on London Underground, particularly those of my constituents who must travel up the Fenchurch Street line to get on to London Underground, is an important issue? Will my hon. Friend ensure that the criteria considered to determine who will get the franchise for the London-Tilbury-Southend line will include the safety of women?

Mr. Norris: One of the most encouraging features of the forthcoming privatisation of train operators is the private sector's instant recognition that the security of potential passengers is absolutely paramount. It has recognised that passengers will not travel if they do not believe that they are safe. One of the most encouraging features of the discussions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and others are having with train operators is those operators' recognition of the importance of the precise point that my hon. Friend has raised.

Ms Walley: Does the Minister agree with the Opposition that as we celebrate International Women's Week, he should do more with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to put women's transport issues at the top of the agenda? The Minister has said an awful lot about his view of travelling with other people, commuters, in the middle of London. Would he like to feel what it is like to be a woman, concerned because many private hire vehicles are not yet properly regulated? Will he particularly explain why he has refused to look at the proposal from the all-party Select Committee on Transport that people guilty of sex offences should be banned from driving either taxis or private hire vehicles?

Mr. Norris: I shall pass over the first part of the hon. Lady's invitation for reasons of which I hope that you, Madam Speaker, would thoroughly approve. On the second half of the hon. Lady's question, I hope that she will tell her friends in the Transport and General Workers Union—who have incited taxi drivers to oppose the checking of minicab drivers for suitability on the ground that that somehow offers a spurious legitimacy to their activities—that they are wrong? I am grateful to her for her endorsement of our response to the Select Committee on Transport, when we recommended the very measures that she has outlined.

Newbury Bypass

7. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his decision on the Newbury bypass.

Dr. Mawhinney: As soon as possible.

Mr. Coombs: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the people of Newbury are holding their breath, waiting for the right decision to be made on that important issue? Is he further aware that they need to hold their breath to avoid breathing in the pollution in Newbury that is caused by continuous traffic jams? Does he agree that a road as important as the A34, which links the port of Southampton with the midlands, needs to be dualled throughout its length to give relief to the people of Newbury?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right to point to the problems that occur around Newbury and the difficulties that they cause to residents of the town and surrounding areas. I have recognised the problem and said that it needs to be addressed—it will be as soon as we are confident of the appropriate and proper way forward.

Red Routes

8. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with motoring organisations concerning red routes or similar schemes in London and other conurbations.

Mr. Norris: We frequently discuss matters of common interest with representatives of motoring organisations. They were formally consulted on the proposals for red routes and the other measures contained in the Road Traffic Act 1991, and also subsequently on the composition of the red route network itself.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister agree that the power to stop vehicles should rest solely with the police? Does he further agree that the provisions in the London Local Authorities Bill, which give the same powers to private contractors for the purpose of emission testing, would set a dangerous precedent and impair the safety of motorists, passengers, and particularly lone women?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the dangers of allowing people who are not properly trained to stop vehicles. The police have made that point and it should be given proper attention. I know that the hon. Gentleman will agree that more enforcement activity

is extremely desirable and we are, in future, likely to look to technology to help us in our enforcement efforts, as police resources are bound to be stretched.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: While I recognise the importance of good traffic management in reducing congestion and, thereby, pollution, what is my hon. Friend's Department doing to investigate oxygenated petrol? Since it was introduced in the United States in 1990, it has reduced by more than 95 per cent. the number of days on which clean air standards are subjugated. It is an important new innovation—will my hon. Friend look at it?

Mr. Norris: I can confirm that my Department is looking at oxygenated petrol. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that some of the technical claims made for the fuel are still subject to confirmation by technical experts. I agree that it is, potentially, an important development.

State Airlines

10. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that no further state subsidy is made available by member states to loss-making state airlines in the EEC.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is already the Government's policy to oppose state aid in air transport which distorts competition.

Mr. Steen: Since the losses in Air France last year were the equivalent of two thirds of the losses of all the airlines in the world and since France uses money to underscore and underpin its airline, but attacks British airlines by reducing fares and thus the profitability of English airlines, when the matter comes up in Europe will the Secretary of State tell the Europeans that enough is enough and that he will use his veto and say "Non" if the French want more subsidies?

Dr. Mawhinney: This subject has already come up since I assumed my responsibility, when the Commission recommended that Air France should be the recipient of £2.4 billion of state aid. I took the view that that was a distortion of competition and that it disadvantaged the passenger. As a consequence, we are taking the Commission to the European Court. My hon. Friend should understand that that is a strong policy of Her Majesty's Government, from which we are unlikely to depart.

Thames Riverboat Service

11. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about reintroducing the riverboat service on the Thames.

Mr. Norris: I have received representations from a number of organisations who have expressed an interest in the operation of some type of commuter service on the Thames. Those proposals are at various stages of development.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister confirm that the most recent proposal is that from Transport on Water, suggested by the hon. Members for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and by others; that the core of the proposal is that there should be a partnership between private provision and public provision; and that London is crying out for the Government to give the idea of a decent riverboat service, which can be used for commuters and visitors, a fair wind and real encouragement? Can he confirm that he supports that, and that he will do everything to ensure that the Department of Transport delivers that public sector support that is needed to ensure that it succeeds this time—that it floats, instead of sinking, as the past two initiatives did?

Mr. Norris: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are keen that a viable proposal for passenger services on the Thames be established. I can confirm that I am very happy to consider carefully any proposal that is made to me in that respect.

Naturally, there has been a limit to the amount of public subsidy that that type of service can attract, given that, at the height of its operations, River-Bus, for example, proposed to carry fewer people in a year than London Buses carries in any one day before about 9 o'clock in the morning, or London Underground carries in one day of its operations. With that important qualification, I am certainly very happy to do what I can to help.

Sir Anthony Durant: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the problems that River-Bus ran into was the lack of piers and jetties? Will he talk to the Port of London authority and persuade it to allow more landing stages?

Mr. Norris: As my hon. Friend may know, that problem was discussed in the deliberations of the Thames working group, which laid its report before Parliament a few weeks ago. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and at the time my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that, if the Department of Transport could help by encouraging more pier provision, it would be only too happy to do so. My hon. Friend is quite right to say that that it is an important part of the provision of any transport service.

Mr. Spearing: Is the Minister aware that the Transport on Water study, to which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred, has been drawn to the attention of four central London boroughs and the City of London, and that we are hoping that Transport on Water—the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) and I are members of the working party—will institute a consortium to investigate the practicalities of the type of proposal described, especially the matching of public provision of piers and private provision of craft?

Mr. Norris: I am delighted to hear of it. The hon. Gentleman has a great deal of experience of those matters. I know that he has spent many years researching several projects on the Thames, and for many years my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) has been an assiduous supporter and follower of many of those projects. I am delighted that two such eminent colleagues are prepared to unite in preparing that proposal. I shall certainly give it every consideration when it reaches me.

Mr. Dunn: If a scheme is finally proposed to re-introduce the River-Bus service on the River Thames, will my hon. Friend ensure that the community of Dartford is involved with such a scheme, given that there

would be a significant possibility of increasing access to London, for leisure and by commuters, if the scheme were to stop at Dartford?

Mr. Norris: Again, I can say to my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already expressed to me his wish to ascertain whether there may be prospects of a viable commuter service from places throughout my hon. Friend's constituency. There appears to be a considerable logic in removing passengers from the crowded road networks in those areas, apart from the creation of an attractive journey pattern into the centre of the City. My hon. Friend will appreciate that we will look to the private sector to bring forward the proposals, but that we stand ready to be as constructive as we can in every case.

Rail Privatisation

12. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what costs were incurred by rail privatisation up to and including January 1995; and what are the projected costs to his Department until January 1996.

Mr. Watts: The total cost of rail privatisation from 1991-92 until the end of January 1995 was £209 million, including costs of new financial and information systems. Estimated costs of the Department from February this year to January 1996 are £26 million. Projected figures are current estimates and exclude the main sale costs for the flotation of Railtrack, which are yet to be determined.

Ms Jackson: I thank the Minister for that reply. Will he tell the House what percentage of that figure can be attributed to consultancy fees paid to firms which make financial contributions to the Conservative party?

Mr. Watts: I have no knowledge of which consultancy firms make contributions to my party or to any other political party. As the hon. Lady knows from answers to earlier questions that she has tabled, the total expenditure on consultancy is £22.5 million, which is included in the total that I gave in reply to her initial question.

Sir Donald Thompson: My hon. Friend will know that the Calder Valley line is a most important east-west line and that my constituents look forward to rail privatisation. Will my hon. Friend spend whatever money is necessary to ensure that they receive fair and honest information about every aspect of privatisation?

Mr. Watts: I agree that it is vital that people receive true, factual and honest information about rail privatisation. If they have that information, they will be as enthusiastic about it and about the benefits that it will bring to the travelling public and to freight users as my hon. Friend and I.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Minister aware that, in addition to the quarter of a billion pounds cost of preparing for privatisation that he quoted, it is also reported that the Secretary of State intends to write off £1.5 billion in debts as a sweetener in order to secure the sale of Railtrack? Is the Minister also aware that senior officers have been offered up to double their present salaries—up to six-figure levels, excluding additional share options—to secure their co-operation in the run-up to privatisation?

Is it not the ultimate absurdity that the cost to the public purse of selling off British Rail is now likely to exceed the total revenues from that sale? Does it not speak volumes for the Government that they can suddenly find billions of pounds to subsidise the privatisation programme when they have starved British Rail of desperately needed cash investment for years?

Mr. Watts: Investment in railways is running at £1 billion this year, it is planned to be at £1 billion next year and it was at an all-time high of more than £1.5 billion very recently. I make £209 million rather less than a quarter of a billion pounds. As to the other figures which the hon. Gentleman adduced, we know how good he is at conjuring figures out of the air and how bad he is at substantiating any of them.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that the purpose of privatisation is to remove burdens from the taxpayers so that the system will ultimately deliver benefits to them, as occurred with British Airways and with all of the other privatisations that have taken place? Instead of taking from the taxpayer, privatisation contributes benefits to the taxpayer.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right to say that we wish to remove unnecessary burdens from the taxpayer. However, I remind him that we are planning to give the Franchising Director a budget of £1,800 million to secure the socially necessary services which the Opposition claim, quite falsely, will be abolished under privatisation.

Low-floor Buses

13. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the transport industry about the introduction of low-floor buses in the past 12 months.

Mr. Norris: My Department has had a number of discussions about the introduction of low-floor buses over the past 12 months with both the manufacturing and operating industries.

Ms Lynne: There is no mention in the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill about access to transport vehicles. What time scale does the Minister envisage for bringing forward legislation to make buses and trains accessible to disabled people? Does he accept that deregulation of buses and the proposed privatisation of the railways could set back that process?

Mr. Norris: As to the hon. Lady's latter point, I see privatisation as doing more to accelerate the provision of decent facilities for disabled people than anything that nationalisation has achieved over the past half century. On the hon. Lady's main point, we have concentrated on ensuring that European Community construction and use directives allow us to specify low-floor buses. That is exactly the right way to proceed, but that process will take time because the Commission must deliberate on the issue. Low-floor buses will bring significant advantages, which I welcome. Not only will they advantage the disabled and others but they can be financially profitable because they allow much faster loading times.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Gordon Prentice. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Perhaps the Opposition Whips will take note. I call Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

Public Services

31. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for further devolution of public services close to the users of services.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. John Horam): Extensive plans—including the launch next week by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and by me of a campaign for customers to nominate excellent services for the charter mark. That is an important way of giving people influence over the services that they receive.

Mrs. Lait: I begin by expressing regret that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has resigned from a post that he graced with skill and good humour. I welcome my hon. Friend the new Minister to the Dispatch Box and to duties that I know that he will undertake with great ability. I thank him for his information about the charter mark. Can he assure me that Liberal-led East Sussex county council will not receive a charter mark until it changes its policy and encourages schools to become grant-maintained? Does my hon. Friend agree that only through organisations such as grant-maintained schools and health trusts can public services be delivered closer to those who use them?

Mr. Horam: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her kind remarks. I also pay tribute to the commitment and humour of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who will be much missed. My hon. Friend is right and makes well the point that grant-maintained schools are the epitome of the devolution that we are talking about. If East Sussex county council would pay more attention to that prospect, it would make much greater progress than clearly it has done.

Mr. Henderson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Dispatch Box. The last time that he held office, it was for a term of three years. The people of Gateshead were terribly disappointed when the Conservative party was removed from office and the hon. Gentleman had to switch sides. The people of Gateshead may be less disappointed on this occasion, if he holds office for fewer than three years.

I do not expect the hon. Gentleman to have fully mastered his brief in the way that his predecessor did, but he told the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) that the Government are intent on devolving power to local people and gave a couple of examples. Is that not a travesty of what is actually occurring in the delivery of public services? Is not ours the most quangoised and centralised society in Europe? Health services, training, economic development and, increasingly, education are delivered by quango. Is it not ironic that at a time when public support for the Government is so low, they have had to advertise for Tory worthies to serve on quangos, to do their dirty work?

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman's remarks are absurd. The fact is that the number of quangos has declined by 36 per cent. Secondly, the actual services are delivered by grant-maintained schools and by GP fundholders—precisely the sort of small organic organisations that we need to run services successfully, and infinitely preferable to the large bureaucratic organisations that flourished under the fiat of Opposition Members.

Ministers (Performance)

32. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to impose minimum performance standards on Ministers with regard to replies to hon. Members' correspondence.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): Ministers always do their best to reply to all ministerial correspondence in as short a time as possible.

Mr. Dowd: I am sure that the Minister must be aware that all hon. Members have to deal with a wide variety of public sector organisations and departments, nearly all of which have set down some sort of minimum time in which we can expect a response of them. Lewisham council, for instance, will reply—this applies to any department—within 10 working days. The great exception is of course the Government, Ministers and the Departments for which they are immediately responsible. I do not doubt that people try their best, but is it not slightly hypocritical of the Government to refuse to impose on themselves standards that they freely inflict on everyone else?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman appears to be unaware of the detailed targets, set out by Ministers and reported on to this House, covering the number of working days within which correspondence will be answered. All Departments have those ministerially agreed targets, and their performance against them is monitored centrally, the results being published in the *Official Report*.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that improving response times is very much part of the citizens charter initiative?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, I completely agree. It has been part of the charter philosophy that people should be entitled to have their correspondence dealt with within a reasonable period. When I was Secretary of State for Employment, I took pride in the fact that the Employment Service met some testing targets for responding to correspondence. I applaud it for what it did and for what many other public organisations are now doing as a result.

Civil Service

33. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in encouraging individuals with relevant outside experience to apply for senior positions in the civil service.

Mr. Horam: We have doubled the number of recruits in two years.

Mr. Robathan: I join others in welcoming my hon. Friend back to the Dispatch Box. I also welcome his response. I welcome, too, the programme of cross-fertilisation of quality as between the civil service

and the private sector; but will my hon. Friend ensure that it does not undermine the morale and high quality of our excellent civil service?

Mr. Horam: I know that my hon. Friend is familiar with the Army. I have no more wish to undermine the morale and high quality of the civil service than I have to harm the Army. I assure my hon. Friend that we have that at the forefront of our minds when implementing the measures that we have adopted, which are in other respects very valuable.

Mr. McNamara: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that I sympathise with his predicament? Having started off with such high hopes in this House, as a Member sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, he ends up as a junior Minister in the most discredited Government of this century.

The Minister will be aware of the convention, in the run-up to a general election, that it is usual to consult the Opposition about certain senior appointments in the civil service. That convention has always been honoured. Should it not now, however, be applied when senior appointments of persons outside the civil service are being made—even though a general election may not be immediately imminent? In particular, should it not also be applied to the appointment of senior civil service commissioners?

Mr. Horam: We shall always consider reasonable requests. The hon. Gentleman knows that the composition of the senior appointments selection board is open and known. We would certainly take account of any reflections that he may have on it.

Cabinet Committees

34. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those Cabinet committees of which he is currently chairman.

Mr. David Hunt: A full list is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Chancellor tell us how many times the committee on women's issues has met in the past three months? Can he give us three examples of subject matters that the committee is examining?

Mr. Hunt: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it has never been the practice for Governments to publish details of the subjects discussed in Cabinet or in Cabinet committees, but we shall have an opportunity in the course of tomorrow's debate to outline the many successful initiatives that the Government have taken. I shall supply the usual information, but not the information that the hon. Gentleman requests, which has never been supplied.

Science

35. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about science week.

Mr. Horam: The national week of science, engineering and technology—SET 95—will begin on Friday 17 March. There will be more than 3,000 events in every part of the United Kingdom—twice as many as last year. I expect it to be a great success.

Mr. Marshall: I join with those who have congratulated my hon. Friend on his promotion. May I ask him in turn to congratulate Christ's college in my constituency on its ingenuity in finding a project that has won the support of the Sir John Cass foundation and local firms and at the same time has given children the excitement that comes with practical problem solving?

Mr. Horam: Yes, I am happy to congratulate Christ's college in my hon. Friend's constituency. I know from my experience in Orpington, where a similar week was held by the Priory school, of the sheer enthusiasm of young people when they are exposed to engineering, talent and people coming in from outside and arousing that instinct that we used to develop. That is the essence of the SET week.

Mr. Miller: I welcome the Minister to his position on the Government Front Bench. I hope that he now has some sympathy with those Government laboratories that are being market-tested. That is surely what is happening to him.

In the light of the national week of science, engineering and technology, does the Minister agree that while the British Association has done remarkably well in developing the programme, there has been a disappointing response from the private sector? Will he, in time for future years of national science weeks—that is, if the Government are in office—ensure that there are urgent consultations with the science-based private sector organisations that ought to have participated in this year's exercise?

Mr. Horam: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but at the same time, I am slightly surprised. Why are there twice as many events as there were last year? I shall examine his point most carefully. We shall make every effort to encourage private sector organisations.

36. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to increase public awareness of the importance of science.

Mr. David Hunt: I attach the greatest importance to increasing public awareness of science, engineering and technology.

Mrs. Knight: My right hon. Friend will know that my qualifications are in science. Does he agree that one of the reasons why young people are put off pursuing science as a career is that it is a harder subject than arts at school? An equal deterrent is the widespread and erroneous belief that the only career for scientists is in laboratories. With that in mind, will he tell me how much he proposes to spend in promoting science, and public awareness of it?

Mr. Hunt: First, I have much sympathy with the points that my hon. Friend has raised. We must ensure that we make the prospect of science education as exciting as possible so that youngsters can see the opportunities that lie ahead in science, engineering and technology.

Secondly, we have decided to increase the public understanding budget within the science budget by 25 per cent. for the coming year, to £1.25 million.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Given that flat-screen television technology has huge potential implications for the balance of payments of the United Kingdom, should its development be left to the marketplace?

Mr. Hunt: I have, on several occasions, referred to what I describe as the development gap, which I define as meaning a gap between a good research idea and a marketable product. We must find better ways of overcoming that gap.

A great deal of work has been done in our universities and research institutions on television technology. That work has been carried forward by many firms within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Japanese.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman shouts from a sedentary position, "Japanese." When I was Secretary of State for Wales, I took great pride in the fact that Sony had decided to establish its European headquarters for colour televisions within Wales.

Mr. Hawkins: Further to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial for science education to be supported to the hilt? Does he agree in particular that steps should be taken to ensure that public awareness of science includes an escape from the so-called "mad professor" syndrome? Children should be encouraged to think of science as a serious career, and it should be promoted especially among girls, as there has been a disappointing tendency to reduce the number of girls studying science subjects at A-level and university. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are committed to ensuring that science is promoted as a serious subject among schoolchildren of both sexes?

Mr. Hunt: I agree that it is very important to highlight the opportunities for both boys and girls not only to obtain science education at school but to pursue science as a career. We have established a special unit in the Office of Science and Technology to promote greater opportunity for women in science, engineering and technology. It is important to ensure that the opportunity of a career in science is available to young women, and we are determined to achieve that.

Funding Priorities

37. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent discussions he has had with the Office of Science and Technology about its funding priorities.

Mr. Horam: Many and continuing.

Ms Lynne: I am delighted to hear that, because the Minister's predecessor said that it was no responsibility of his to discuss funding with the Office of Science and Technology or with the Medical Research Council. Perhaps the Minister will now look at my previous questions about breast cancer research and research into aids for disabled people, and perhaps I can be given a fuller answer than his predecessor gave me.

Mr. Horam: I am aware of the hon. Lady's continuing interest in those matters, and I well understand her sincere concern. I shall study her questions carefully. Let me repeat that, as the hon. Lady knows, such issues are decided on merit; but I shall take into account what she has said.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: A moment ago, the Chancellor referred to the development gap that appears to have mysteriously evolved between basic science and what is industrially applicable. Is that not the same as something called "near-market research", funds for which were slashed by Lady Thatcher in the last Conservative Government?

Mr. Horam: That is a matter for the President of the Board of Trade.

Next Steps Agencies

38. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of civil servants are now employed in next steps agencies; and what the figure was two years ago.

Mr. David Hunt: Sixty-two per cent., whereas it was 51 per cent. two years ago.

Mr. Couchman: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the Public Accounts Committee's concern that the high standards of service and probity that have always been symbolic of our civil service should be maintained in the next steps agencies and other non-departmental public bodies. Will he assure the House that he will keep a close watch on probity and integrity in the public service, whether in the civil service itself or in the next steps agencies?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, I will. I was very pleased not only by the point made by the Public Accounts Committee, but by what was said in the recent report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. That Committee said:

"We share the Government's view that the Next Steps reforms are in principle compatible with the maintenance of the traditional values of the Civil Service."

Those traditional values—impartiality, integrity, selection and promotion on merit and accountability—are extremely valuable. We are arranging for a new handbook to be issued to all agency chief executives, to ensure that service-wide rules on conduct and financial propriety are always available in readily accessible form.

Ms Eagle: Would the Chancellor care to comment on stories that the chief executive of the Prison Service agency was not the first choice for the job? That would not have happened if the traditions of the civil service had been upheld. Would the right hon. Gentleman care to tell us precisely how the appointment was made?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Lady should refrain from peddling scurrilous stories in the Chamber. She should concentrate on the fact that the next steps agencies have been a remarkable success, and on the fact that we have been able to find some extremely good people to lead them, not only in the civil service but outside it.

Information Super-highway

39. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps his Department is taking to help with the introduction and use of the information super-highway.

Mr. Horam: We are leading and co-ordinating its use by Government Departments, stimulating public discussion on super-highway issues and, at an international level, leading a G7 pilot project on "Government on-line".

Mr. Bruce: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his journey from highways to super-highways and thank him for his answer about the Government's involvement in the Internet and on using that technology. Has he seen the report that came out of the G7 conference? The first two points that it suggested were dynamic competition and private investment in the Internet. Does he feel that the Government's role is to be an enthusiastic customer of that technology so that they give the encouragement for the investment that we need from private industry to get in and provide the networks?

Mr. Horam: Yes, I entirely take the point that my hon. Friend made. The Government should be a demonstrator of the value of the Internet. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that, when I walked into my office this morning, I noticed that I could call up the Internet on my PC. I was also pleased by that.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On Monday last, the Chancellor made a statement to the House, following the collapse of Barings bank. On Friday, on the BBC, he was good enough to say that he had withheld certain details when he made his statement.

In the light of what has happened over the past week, especially the concerns over the role of the Bank of England in the affair, and as the takeover is now going ahead—bonuses are being paid, although the position of the investors and depositors is not yet clear—I wonder whether there is any mechanism whereby the Chancellor is required to come back to the House to explain what he meant when he said that he had not revealed the whole story to us? I understand that he is reluctant to make a statement, for reasons that we can understand, but it cannot be satisfactory that the Chancellor does not tell the House the whole story when he makes a statement.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No, I shall deal with this point of order first, thank you.

As the hon. Gentleman and the House are aware, I have no authority to require any Minister to come and make a statement. The hon. Gentleman has some ingenuity and I am sure that he will find ways in the course of our proceedings or through the Order Paper to get the Government to come forward if he wishes further statements to be made or on any point of clarification.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On that matter, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: No, there is no further point of order.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a related matter, Madam Speaker. When the Chancellor made his statement last week, he did not say that the Bank of England might be responsible for actions of which it now stands accused by the Singapore authorities. Would you be prepared to show some flexibility in deciding what questions can be tabled, because I have a whole series of questions that I want to table about the actions of the Bank of England, but am concerned that when I seek to table them I will be told by the Clerks that I cannot do so because those questions are the subject of the inquiry that has been ordered by the Chancellor and are covered by the statement that was made at the Dispatch Box last week? All that I am asking is that we be permitted to ask questions freely and that there is no rule to allow the Clerks to hide behind the statement of last Monday.

Madam Speaker: I must make it quite clear that the Clerks of the House hide behind no statements. They are available to help any hon. Member from any part of the House, and they do so willingly. The hon. Gentleman's point is somewhat hypothetical, but I understand his concerns. I am certainly not going to give a ruling about it, but perhaps he will attempt to table his questions and we shall see where we go from there.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is there any way in which a statement can be made by the appropriate Minister, not necessarily the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as it has now been discovered that, over the years, Barings bank allocated more than £700,000 to Tory party coffers? On the basis of that evidence and the collapse of the bank, I believe that the public demand a statement from the appropriate Minister so that we can question what has happened to that money and whether it should be paid back.

Madam Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave a little earlier.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may recall that, three years ago, there was a frightening accident that involved many of my constituents and in which 108 people were injured in the Severn tunnel. You may be aware, too, that, three years on, the local fire brigade in Gwent has said that the safety improvements that it called for in the tunnel have not been carried out. Have you had any request from the Department of Transport to make a statement on this alarming situation?

Madam Speaker: I have had no request from the Secretary of State for Transport or from any of his Ministers to make a statement on that matter.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may have seen, as I did, in this morning's press articles saying that the advisers who originally advocated the programme of hospital bed closures in London have now changed their minds and have acknowledged that that is extremely damaging. Have you had any word from the Secretary of State for Health to the effect that she intends to announce that she has changed her mind as well?

Madam Speaker: Let me make it clear to all hon. Members who wish to know whether a statement is to be made today that none will be made today. If any were to be made news to that effect would be put on the annunciator by 1 o'clock. We shall now proceed with the business of the House.

Orders of the Day

Criminal Appeal Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As the whole House will agree, any miscarriage of justice is a serious matter, not only for the person wrongly convicted, but for all of us, because it affects public confidence in the criminal justice system. We share a common interest in ensuring that our system is the best we can provide, that it contains all the necessary safeguards to minimise the possibility of a wrongful conviction, the most effective appeals procedures that we can devise, and the best machinery for investigating possible miscarriages of justice.

We have done a great deal in recent years to improve the operation of the criminal justice system. Measures range from the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, from the tape recording of interviews with suspects to the establishment of the first comprehensive national DNA database anywhere in the world, and from improvements in police training to the great strides made in forensic science. Major advances have been made in the fight against crime and in protecting the public.

The Bill represents the next step. It will create the new and independent arrangements for identifying possible miscarriages of justice, and it will reinforce and extend the powers of the courts in criminal appeals. In so doing, it implements some of the key recommendations made by the Royal Commission on criminal justice in July 1993.

My current powers to refer cases to the Court of Appeal as a last resort have been in place since the turn of the century. They have served us well in the past, but there is now universal agreement that a fresh approach is needed. In particular, we need a new investigative body that is constitutionally separate from, and visibly independent of, both Government and the courts. We also need to clarify and strengthen the powers of the Court of Appeal to identify and resolve doubtful cases at the earliest opportunity. The Bill fulfils those aims.

I make no apology for refusing to rush into legislation. The Bill contains the most significant changes to the structure of our criminal appeals system for almost 30 years. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I thought it right and necessary to consult in detail about our proposals, and we have benefited greatly from the opinions and advice of many who work in the criminal justice system and beyond.

The Bill is in three main parts. Part I clarifies and strengthens the powers of the respective courts of appeal in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland. Part II establishes the new criminal cases review commission. The two parts are, of course, closely linked. Part III extends the powers of magistrates courts to reopen cases to rectify mistakes.

The commission will examine cases in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and decide whether to refer them to the courts in the respective jurisdictions. It will be independent, accessible and open. It will have strong investigative powers, and it will be well resourced. Between them, its members will bring to bear a wide range of qualifications and experience. They will need all those, because the task that they face is difficult and complex.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): What is the Home Secretary's most up-to-date assessment of the number of cases that the new body will deal with in the first year? Will he confirm that it will not balk at any conviction as long as the person concerned is still alive?

Mr. Howard: It will have to take into account the criteria that are set out in the Bill. As I shall shortly say, we have made an assumption about the number of cases that the new body will deal with in its first year. If the hon. Gentleman will be patient I shall explain precisely what the assumption is.

The final decision on any case which is referred will rest either with the relevant Court of Appeal—if the case was tried originally on indictment—or with the Crown court, or the county court in Northern Ireland, following a referral in a summary case. The courts will therefore continue to be responsible for determining all appeals whether made to them direct or on referral by the commission. That is the right approach; matters of guilt and innocence are properly for the courts to determine.

I come now to the detail of the Bill. All the provisions in part I either respond to the recommendations of the royal commission or else improve the operation of the Court of Appeal in other ways.

The Bill places appeals against conviction on a point of law on the same footing as other appeals against conviction and sentence. Leave to appeal will be required in such cases except where the trial judge has certified the case as fit for appeal. That will provide a filter mechanism for appeals on a ground of law which are obviously without merit.

The Bill clarifies the grounds for allowing and dismissing an appeal. The present formula involves three overlapping grounds and is widely felt to cause confusion. Under the Bill, the Court of Appeal will allow any appeal where it considers the conviction unsafe and will dismiss it in any other case. That simple test clarifies the terms of the existing law. In substance, it restates the existing practice of the Court of Appeal and I am pleased to note that the Lord Chief Justice has already welcomed it.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): As the Home Secretary will know, the royal commission suggested a rather different test—that the conviction should be set aside if it is or may be unsafe. The test in the Bill is that it is unsafe. It appears to Justice and others that that may be a much more narrow and restrictive test than the royal commission had in mind. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give the House his observations on that?

Mr. Howard: The test in the Bill is the result of our consideration of the matter in the light of the consultation exercise. It is a simple test, a straightforward test and, I believe, an easily understandable test. As I said, the Lord Chief Justice has already welcomed it. That is why we have opted for the test in the Bill. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman's point will be the subject of detailed consideration in Standing Committee.

The Bill also lowers the threshold for the admission of fresh evidence by the Court of Appeal along the lines recommended by the royal commission, and provides a means of beginning or continuing an appeal on behalf of a person who has died.

The respective Courts of Appeal in England and Wales and Northern Ireland will also be able to direct the new commission to investigate certain matters relating to an appeal before the court and to report their findings to the court. I think that that power will rarely be needed, but it is there for the exceptional case and it is an important addition to the court's powers to remedy wrongful convictions.

Part II of the Bill establishes the criminal cases review commission with powers to investigate possible miscarriages of justice and refer appropriate cases back to the courts. It will be able to refer a case on grounds of conviction or sentence or both, as I may already do at present; and it will be possible for the first time to make referrals in summary cases.

The commission will be independent both of the Government and the courts, with members appointed by Her Majesty the Queen on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. There will be a chairman and a minimum of 10 other members. At least one third of the members at any one time will be legally qualified and at least two thirds will have relevant experience of the criminal justice system. All appointments will be made on the basis of the particular experience, expertise and other abilities that the applicant will bring to the work in hand.

All the posts on the board of the commission, including that of chairman, will be advertised publicly. We want the best candidates for the job and we think that this is the best means of ensuring that.

We have provided sufficient resources to enable the commission to deal with its expected case load as swiftly and effectively as possible. We have assumed that it may receive, at least initially, at least twice as many representations as come to the Home Office and the Northern Ireland Office at present. The commission will need to employ up to 60 staff, which is about three times the number currently engaged in such work within my Department and the Northern Ireland Office. Although the recruitment of its staff will be a matter for the commission, we expect that its staff will reflect the broad mix of legal, investigative and administrative skills and experience needed to do work of this sort. As with the posts of the members, those of the commission's staff will be filled by open competition following advertisement.

As Home Secretary, I will remain responsible for the law under which the commission will operate, but I will take no part in its day-to-day decisions and administration—those will be matters for the commission. The Bill does require the commission to keep proper accounts and to submit an annual report to me. I will lay that before Parliament. The accounts will also be laid before the House following their audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

At present, the only means at my disposal and at the disposal of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for correcting a miscarriage of justice in a summary case is to recommend to Her Majesty that she grant a free pardon under the royal prerogative of mercy. But although a free pardon removes the effect of the punishment, it is clearly unsatisfactory that it does not quash or reverse the conviction. That is something that only the courts can do. The Bill therefore provides for the first time for summary convictions, following investigation, to be referred to the Crown court in England and Wales and to the county courts in Northern Ireland respectively.

Most miscarriages in summary cases are straightforward. They do not require detailed investigation of the sort that the commission will undertake before referring any case to the courts. The Bill therefore provides a simpler remedy for the straightforward case. It extends the existing powers of magistrates courts in England and Wales to reopen cases to rectify earlier errors where that would be in the interests of justice, irrespective of the plea entered at trial. The Bill makes comparable provision for Northern Ireland. That is an entirely new power for the Province.

In view of the changes that will be made as a result of the Bill, we have also considered whether the royal prerogative of mercy should continue to be available in conviction cases. Like the royal commission, we have concluded that it will still be needed for the very exceptional case—but only the very exceptional case. For example, it will still be needed where there is new evidence which, for some reason, is inadmissible.

The decision as to whether I should recommend the exercise of the prerogative in relation to any conviction usually necessitates some investigation of the facts of the case. The Bill therefore gives me and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland power to refer any matters requiring investigation to the commission. That will ensure that any inquiries needed will be undertaken by a body empowered and resourced to consider possible miscarriages of justice.

It is vital to the success of the new arrangements that Ministers are not seen as an alternative to the commission or as a court of appeal from its decisions. The new power enables Ministers, in reaching a decision on the exercise of the prerogative in relation to a conviction, to rely on the results of any investigations already undertaken by the commission and, where inquiries may be needed, to ensure that the commission has the opportunity to fulfil its proper function, thus obviating the need for any separate investigations to be carried out under the auspices of Ministers.

The Bill gives the commission all the powers that it needs to carry out its investigations effectively and thoroughly.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman will restrain himself for a moment, he will find that I am about to deal with the points that I anticipate he is going to raise.

The commission will be able to obtain the assistance of police forces and other bodies by requiring them to appoint an investigating officer to make inquiries on its behalf, in accordance with its directions and, if necessary, under its supervision; it will be able to require the appointment of an investigating officer from a different police force from that which investigated the crime originally; it will be able to insist that it approves the choice of the officer appointed before an investigation takes place; it will be able to commission its own expert opinions and tests; and it will have power to obtain access to documents held by police forces and other bodies.

[Mr. Howard]

The commission will also be able to obtain relevant papers and other material held by me and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as a consequence of our having considered possible miscarriages of justice cases under our existing powers. It is clear from this that the commission will initiate and take responsibility for any investigations undertaken on its behalf by the police and other public bodies.

We believe that, in the majority of cases, the commission must have access to the knowledge, expertise and other resources of the police. Indeed, we think we would be doing the cause of justice a gross disservice if we denied the commission access to the wealth of expertise available in police forces. I am aware of the concerns expressed on this point by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

Mr. Mullin: And by one or two others.

Mr. Howard: Plainly, one or two others. The hon. Gentleman believes—

Mr. Mullin *rose—*

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall continue for a moment.

The hon. Gentleman believes that the use of the police in the manner that I have proposed is a fatal flaw in the new arrangements. He says that it flies in the face of almost all the advice that I have received. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's work over the years as a standard bearer for the cause of those who have been wrongly convicted, but I must take issue with him on this point.

The Government's proposals do not run counter to all the received advice—far from it. They are in line with the royal commission's recommendations. Indeed, the royal commission concluded that there was "no practicable alternative" to the commission using the police, given

"the size and scope of the inquiries"

needed in miscarriage cases. Most of those who have responded to our consultation papers on this point, including Viscount Runciman, the chairman of the royal commission, the Police Complaints Authority, the Bar Council and the Justices' Clerks Society, as well as the representatives of the police services, agreed that the new body should be able to commission investigations from the police.

Many of the best-known cases in recent years came to notice through the efforts of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South and others. Each, crucially, required thorough police investigation to uncover the evidence on which the cases were referred and the convictions quashed. The cases of the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, the Darvell brothers, who were convicted of the murder of a Swansea sex shop manageress in 1986, and Stefan Kiszko are all examples of referrals following patient, thorough police work.

The Bill requires the commission to be satisfied before making a reference that there is some new element, whether argument or evidence—

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my right hon and learned Friend not shut his mind to the fact that there is a body of young, retired police officers who do not have a great deal of future, as the system presently operates, within the criminal justice system, in which they have massive expertise? Would he consider the possibility of having a panel of retired police officers, which might go some way towards answering the concerns of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) because the people concerned would not be serving members in a police force? They could, nevertheless, deploy their expertise in the taking of statements and the investigation of possible miscarriages of justice and, thereby, continue to make a contribution to the criminal justice system when, in all other circumstances, they would have to seek fresh pastures elsewhere. That might also relieve the pressure on police forces.

Mr. Howard: I have no doubt that the point raised by my hon. and learned Friend will be considered in Committee. I cannot pretend that I am immediately attracted to it. I confess that I think that the natural people to whom the commission will want to turn, having regard to the fact that the commission will have the power to direct and supervise closely the investigations that are conducted on its behalf, will be the police.

I do not accept that there is anything unsatisfactory about the police carrying out these investigations. I have already said that they are entitled to the credit for the investigations that have been carried out in the past. It will, of course, be possible, as I have said, for the commission to go to a different force. I am not immediately attracted by the suggestion of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir. I. Lawrence). No doubt it can be considered further in detail in Committee.

Mr. Mullin *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I should give way first to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Home Secretary accept that no one is suggesting that all investigations should be kept away from the police? What people are suggesting—and just about everybody who has first-hand experience of dealing with miscarriages of justice suggests this—is that the commission should have a reserve power which would enable it to order investigations by people who were not police officers if it appeared that the police were not trying hard enough. I am sorry to say that in some of these cases, that has been so. Cardinal Hume, in a letter to *The Times* today, which I am sure the Home Secretary has seen, makes precisely that suggestion. Will the Home Secretary respond to that?

Mr. Howard: Yes, I have read the cardinal's letter. He suggests that the powers available to the commission to direct and supervise inquiries carried out in such cases are unduly limited. I very much hope that he will reconsider that view when he has had more of an opportunity to study the terms of the Bill, because the key to the matter is that there are no sensible limits on the power of the commission to direct and supervise the inquiries that are carried out on its behalf. The answer to the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South is to be found in that power of direction and supervision.

I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise that the police have been dilatory in the past. Whether or not that is the case—it is not an argument that we need to get into this afternoon—the new body will have available to it powers of direction and supervision, and will have available on its staff those whose expertise and experience it needs to ensure that the powers are used effectively so that the necessary investigations carried out on its behalf are thorough, expeditious and effective. We must look to those powers to meet the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Miller: The Home Secretary will be aware of a dilemma in a particular case, because we have corresponded about it. I will not mention it in detail, because it would be improper to do so at this stage, but the investigating authorities have changed several times during the investigation. Police officers have retired in mid-stream and other changes have occurred which have caused a great deal of consternation in that case. Will he assure the House that the powers of appointment, which he envisages being vested with the new commission, will be used to ensure that the police officers appointed to a case, according to his model of the authority, will be in place for the duration of an inquiry and under the sole control of the commission?

Mr. Howard: I think that the hon. Gentleman would accept that it is not always possible to predict the retirement of police officers. It is not always possible to predict that a police officer appointed from the best of motives and with the best intentions, on the basis that he will deal with a particular inquiry for its duration, will continue to be available to do that. Life is, by its very nature, unpredictable.

Subject to that, I see no reason why the commission, when discussing with a chief constable the arrangements to be made for carrying out a particular investigation, should not seek assurances that the chief constable will use his best endeavours to choose officers who will be available for the duration of the investigation to obviate the kind of difficulty to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

The Bill requires the commission to be satisfied before making a reference that there is some new element, whether argument or evidence in conviction cases, or argument on a point of law or information in sentence cases, which the courts have not previously considered and which gives rise to a real possibility that the conviction or sentence will not be upheld by the relevant court. That is a broad and sensible criterion. It clearly defines the boundaries between the commission's functions and that of the courts. There is no purpose in the commission referring a case where there is nothing new for the courts to consider—indeed, it would be unhelpful if the legislation appeared to leave that possibility open.

The commission will give its reasons to the courts for referring the case, but that will not amount to a recommendation on the merits of the resulting appeal. As I have already said, it is for the courts to decide whether any appeal is to be allowed or dismissed.

We agree with the royal commission that those seeking a review of their case by the commission should be kept properly informed of the progress of any investigation into their case, and that they should be given a full and reasoned explanation of any decision not to refer their case to the courts. The Bill therefore provides for the commission to give a statement of its reasons to the court when referring a case, which it will copy to the parties to the resulting appeal, and its reasons to the convicted person when it decides not to refer. Subject to the need to preserve confidentiality, the commission will be able to keep applicants informed of the progress made in investigating their cases and to disclose information to them so that, in the interests of fairness, they can make further representations to the commission in the light of any matters found.

Investigating possible miscarriages of justice can raise sensitive issues, which need careful handling. The Bill therefore makes it an offence for a member of the commission or one of its staff or an investigating officer to disclose any information gathered by the commission in the course of its activities, save in the circumstances set out in the Bill. The gateways provided in the Bill are sufficient to enable the commission to disclose relevant information in the way that I set out earlier.

The public are rightly concerned about the quality of criminal justice. They demand a system which is effective in every respect and in which they can have confidence—confidence in relation to justice for victims, justice for defendants and justice for society. The Government will not shrink from their duty to provide what the public rightly expect. Our strategy is ambitious and far reaching, and it is broad. It is both careful and valuable. It is concerned with safeguards for the innocent, as well as with the apprehension and punishment of the guilty.

The Bill is of the greatest importance in promoting the aim of a criminal justice system which is strong, effective and fair, and in which the guilty are justly punished and the innocent have nothing to fear. I think that it will be widely welcomed and I commend it to the House.

4 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The Labour party supports the Bill and will give it an unopposed Second Reading tonight. However, as I shall explain, we have serious reservations about some of its aspects, particularly those relating to the form of investigation undertaken by the proposed commission. We shall pursue those reservations in detail in Committee and on Report.

The Bill's central proposal, for a criminal cases review commission the better to investigate miscarriages of justice, formed one of the key sets of recommendations of the royal commission on criminal justice, which reported in June 1993. Although the terms of reference were wide, the royal commission owed its very establishment to mounting public concern about the ability of the criminal justice system to secure justice for the Birmingham Six and, before them, the Guildford Four and the Maguires.

The royal commission was, commendably, appointed by the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who I see is in his place today, on the day the Court of Appeal quashed the sentences of the Birmingham Six, who had been convicted of murder following bomb explosions in public houses in Birmingham in November 1974 and had served more than 16 years in prison for crimes that the Court of Appeal finally found that they had not committed.

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Although the number of miscarriages of justice is a tiny proportion of the total number of criminal cases processed in any one year, the effect of such miscarriages on public confidence is huge. On the issue of public confidence, the royal commission said:

"The widely publicised miscarriages of justice which have occurred in recent years have created a need to restore public confidence in the criminal justice system. That need has not diminished since we were appointed. In addition to the terrorist cases where the convictions were quashed in 1990 and 1991, there has been since our appointment a fourth such case (Judith Ward) where the conviction was quashed in 1992. There has also been a number of cases not connected with terrorism, the most notable examples being those of the Broadwater Farm Three, Stefan Kiszko, and the Cardiff Three. We are particularly concerned that the last occurred after the implementation of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and its related codes of practice."

The royal commission continued:

"the damage done by the minority of cases in which the system is seen to have failed is out of all proportion to their number. The maintenance of law and order is critically dependent on public goodwill, not only in the need for the law as such to command general assent but in the dependence of the police, whose duty it is to enforce the law, on the willingness of individual citizens to cooperate with them. The proportion of crimes solved by the police without help of any kind from members of the public is negligible, and the ability of the police to perform their function is impaired twice over if victims and witnesses are unwilling to give evidence in court because they no longer believe that trials are conducted fairly."

A miscarriage of justice involves the conviction, and usually imprisonment, of the innocent, but it also involves the escape of the guilty. Those who committed the outrages in Guildford and Birmingham have not spent one day in prison for those crimes. However, in any fair system of criminal justice, the burden of proof must be weighted in favour of the accused because of the extreme consequence to an individual and his or her family of a wrongful conviction.

I have nowhere read a better description of the peril of miscarriage of justice than that given by the parliamentary ombudsman in the Preece case. He said:

"A miscarriage of justice by which a man or a woman loses his or her liberty is one of the gravest matters which can occupy the attention of a civilised society. And it seems to me that when an unprecedented pollution of justice at its source is discovered, quite an exceptional effort to identify and remedy its consequences is called for."

From 1907 until the Bill before us, the source of that exceptional effort to identify and remedy each miscarriage of justice has been the Home Secretary, acting on the advice of officials. Over time, and under pressure from Committees of the House and groups outside the House, such as Justice and the National Council for Civil Liberties, those powers of the Home Secretary and the parallel powers of the Court of Appeal have been widened a little.

None the less, as Sir John May noted in his report on the Maguire case, officials and Ministers have consistently adopted strict self-imposed limits on their discretion to refer cases back to the Court of Appeal. Sir John May said at paragraph 10.7:

"However, there is no doubt that the criterion so defined was a limiting one and has resulted in responsible officials within the Home Office taking a substantially restricted view of cases to which their attention has been drawn, as it was in the case of the Maguires. The very nature and terms of the self imposed limits on the Home Secretary's power to refer cases have led the Home Office only to respond to the representations which have been made to it in relation to particular convictions rather than to carry out its own investigations into the circumstances of a particular case or the evidence given at trial. As it was expressed to me on a number of occasions in the course of the evidence the approach of the Home Office was throughout reactive, it was never thought proper for the Department to become proactive".

Although that attitude is understandable, given the importance of the separation of the judicial process from political decision making, it has led to a number of miscarriages—no one knows what the total might be—escaping the net. It was the feeling that the current system had fundamental flaws which led the law reform group, Justice, in 1968 to recommend independent machinery similar to, although not the same as, that now proposed in the Bill.

That proposal by Justice was followed by the all-party Home Affairs Select Committee report in 1982, recommending independent machinery similar to that contained in the Bill—recommendations which, sadly, were rejected by the Government of the time.

In 1988, Sir John Farr, a former distinguished Conservative Member of the House, together with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), moved amendments to give effect to the 1982 proposals of the Home Affairs Select Committee. Sad to say, those were rejected at that time on behalf of the Government by the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten).

The fact that it has taken more than 20 years' pressure and the incarceration of some innocent people for almost as long a period to persuade Ministers and their advisers of the need for change will, I hope, lead to some humility and cause the same Ministers and advisers to be ready to listen to some important criticisms that we and others have to make of the Bill's scheme of operation.

By their nature, miscarriages of justice arise when there is a failure by police and prosecuting lawyers or by defence lawyers. Those miscarriages have often been compounded by failures in the existing official and ministerial system for considering allegations and referring them to the Court of Appeal.

The Bill clearly recognises the unsuitability of having Ministers make not just so-called quasi-judicial decisions but almost wholly judicial decisions on referrals. That position is remedied by transferring that power to the new commission. The Bill also implicitly recognises that it would be inappropriate for those directly responsible for the prosecution process to be involved in judging whether that process has operated properly in specific cases, or whether it has contributed prima facie to a miscarriage of justice. At no stage, therefore, in the Bill's scheme are the Director of Public Prosecutions or the Crown Prosecution Service given any role to investigate failings by prosecuting lawyers, even if it could be argued that CPS staff are more likely to be au fait with that prosecuting process.

The Bill establishes a new separation of powers in respect both of Ministers and of prosecuting lawyers. In commendably achieving that separation of powers, there is no implication that the public no longer have confidence in Ministers or lawyers to make fair-minded decisions. However, there is a strong implication that justice must not only be done but be seen to be done and that a clear separation of powers, visible and transparent, is therefore required.

The Home Secretary made that point in his speech commending the Bill to the House when he said that the commission will be

"constitutionally separate from and visibly independent of Government and the courts".

That is entirely correct, but I find it difficult to understand why the Home Secretary expresses with such clarity the need for that body to be visibly independent from the courts and from Ministers but does not apply the same clarity when it comes to the need for it to be visibly independent from the police.

There is no clear separation of powers when it comes to the role of the police in investigating alleged miscarriages of justice—notwithstanding the fact that a high proportion of serious miscarriages of justice are likely to involve the police and may include anything from an innocent misjudgment on their part about the credibility of a key witness to serious misconduct of an investigation, including perjury by some of the officers concerned.

Clause 19 gives the commission the power to direct and supervise investigations, but the investigations will generally be carried out by the police. Under clause 18, the basic duty of investigation falls on the chief constable of the force which investigated the original offence. When the commission requires an officer from a different force to investigate a matter, the original chief constable may choose from which force he should come.

I do not believe that the scheme is right in principle. It would be far better if the system of investigation were independent, and were seen to be so. It would be better for public confidence in both the criminal justice system and in the police, and it would save money in the long run. I am not criticising the police, any more than the Home Secretary was criticising the courts or Ministers by proposing a clear separation between them and the commission. I have the highest regard for the police and the difficulties that they face in pursuing the duties that we impose on them, but if the police are seen as judge and jury in their own cause public confidence in them and in the system will not be properly established.

As the Home Secretary said, the new scheme is based on a parallel with the Police Complaints Authority. When I first came entered Parliament I took an extremely close interest in the handling of police complaints and I must say that I do not regard the Police Complaints Authority parallel as helpful. I know of the dedication and commitment of the authority's staff and its members, and I know of the exacting standards that senior investigating officers and their teams of police officers set in seeking to root out corruption and other unacceptable practices committed by a tiny minority of police. No group is more offended by corruption or malpractice in the police force than the 99.9 per cent. of police officers who do a difficult job exceptionally well and to the highest standards.

Despite the commitment and dedication of the PCA and of police at all levels, however, the unpalatable truth about the Police Complaints Authority is that it has failed to instil public confidence because the public believe that, under this system, the police are investigating themselves. When the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which established the Police Complaints Authority came before the House, the Police Federation perceptively noted:

"It will not enhance public confidence in the system and will probably not improve police morale either. We remain firmly of the view that only a wholly independent system of investigation will satisfy all parties."

That lack of full public confidence has had severe consequences for the PCA. I believe that it has led to an increased case load and an elaborate waste of resources on patently unmeritorious complaints because of the public's reluctance to take no for an answer. How often have hon. Members on both sides of the House been visited by members of the public who are dissatisfied with the results of PCA investigations?

More significantly, that lack of confidence—however unfair—in the authority's system is leading to increasing use of more direct remedies to alleged police malpractice, bypassing PCA procedures. In the 12 years from 1981 to 1992 in the Metropolitan police area alone, there was a fivefold increase in cases pursued through the civil courts against the police for assault, false imprisonment or malicious prosecution. Those actions were consciously brought to bypass PCA procedures. In 1981, 92 such cases went to court; by 1993-94 the figure had increased to 494.

The problem with the PCA is that it has lagged behind public opinion. It is essential that does not happen with the new criminal cases review commission and that we get it right first time. Above all, we must get it right in terms of public confidence, which can be secured only if the commission is seen to be independent.

There are practical reasons for ensuring that the commission's independence is beyond doubt. From its inception, the CCRC is likely to be overwhelmed by a huge backlog. Many cases, almost by definition, will be unmeritorious but they will all have to be sifted and carefully reviewed. It is vital that when the commission says no to an application, that will be taken as no by the applicant, his or her advisers, those who monitor the system and, above all, Members of Parliament. If the review process's independence is not established in the public mind early on, the commission will be under constant and costly pressure to reopen cases.

Those who argue in favour of the Bill's investigation scheme, whereby principal responsibility rests with the police, do so on the ground of practicality. Although the Home Secretary did not say this, my reading of the royal commission's recommendations was that they were an implicit admission that, in principle, it might be better for investigations to be undertaken by a core staff dedicated for that purpose and employed directly by the commission; but in the view of the royal commission, shared by the Home Secretary, that approach was overwhelmed by questions of practicality.

I do not find those arguments persuasive. The first argument, which the Home Secretary deployed, is that the commission must have access to the knowledge and wealth of expertise of the police. Others argue that it is essential for investigators to have up-to-date knowledge of police methods. I believe that that view is held by the Association of Chief Police Officers. It is important that we should take account of the views of ACPO and others directly involved. The point is made also that police methods change rapidly and radically. I accept that premise, but not the conclusion that it is possible to draw

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on police knowledge and expertise, or to have access to current police methods, only through the use of currently employed police officers.

We believe that there should be a corps of investigators employed directly by the commission, some of them permanently. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) made the important point that, with all the changes which followed the assault by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) on the police service, a large number of extremely skilled and relatively young police officers are approaching redundancy. They are not all ready for the retirement heap. They are experienced, and they could form part of the commission's core staff.

Mr. Mullin: May I put it to my hon. Friend that this corps of dedicated staff should not consist only of retired police officers? There are one or two well qualified journalists who have built up some knowledge in this area and who might prove suitable.

Mr. Straw: I share one thing with the Home Secretary—I had anticipated my hon. Friend's comments. The next page of my speech goes on to say that not only police officers are skilled in this area; journalists and solicitors are, too. The most serious miscarriages of justice, which my hon. Friend played such a crucial part in remedying, were uncovered initially not by the work of the police but by the work of journalists, Members of Parliament and solicitors.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that, besides police officers who are nearing the age of retirement, there are also many officers who have unfortunately been injured in the course of their duties and who cannot continue to perform as full constables? They are perfectly capable, however, of carrying out this type of investigation.

Mr. Straw: I accept that. Another result of the assault on the police by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe has been the removal of quite a number of the inside jobs which used to be available to such police officers but which have now been passed over to—cheaper—civilians.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Would the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a danger in journalists of the kind whom he has in mind being asked to take an active role in these investigations? They are usually campaigning journalists with a political axe to grind. Surely it is important to ensure that those who take part are politically impartial.

Mr. Straw: Of course I accept that, but I do not subscribe to the hon. Lady's assertion that all journalists with an investigative bent follow a particular political agenda. Evidence of the serious and endemic corruption in the Metropolitan police, from which so many of the police's problems with public perception stem, was produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s not by the police but by courageous journalists employed, for example, by *The Times* and the "World in Action" programme—

Lady Olga Maitland: And the *New Statesman and Society.*

Mr. Straw: I am glad to hear that the hon. Lady reads that august journal.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): But she does not understand it.

Mr. Straw: Nor do the rest of us, of course. I write for it, though, and I can understand what I write.

To continue my point about the possibility of some police working directly and permanently for the commission while others are seconded for a period, there is a long tradition in the police service of some high-flying police officers being seconded to national squads, or to the Home Office to work alongside HM inspectors of police. There is no reason why such officers should not be seconded to the new commission. In large forces some officers are in any event seconded from operational duties to run the complaints service, so I see no major issue of principle at stake.

As for whether police will have an intimate knowledge of the police service, the culture of different police forces varies so much—as those of us with experience of more than one force will know—that it would, indeed, take an officer from the same force to know all the wrinkles of that force's culture. Nevertheless, people on all sides of the argument have accepted that the last people who should investigate allegations of serious miscarriages of justice are officers from the force involved.

I do not, therefore, honestly believe that there is much force in the argument of the Home Secretary and of those who support him—that it would be wrong for the commission to have a corps of staff investigators to take on the central burden of investigating the cases that come before them. The corps could, of course, draw on other police forces elsewhere in the United Kingdom as the caseload and the types of cases required.

The other argument advanced by the Home Secretary in the consultative document was that the caseload would vary. That, too, was an argument against having such a corps. It is true that the case load will vary, but the case load of police forces varies enormously, especially that of specialised squads. No one is proposing that there should be a large standing army of investigators to deal with the maximum caseload. Instead, we are proposing that there should be a corps of investigators employed or seconded to the commission, which will be there to deal with the minimum foreseeable case load, which is likely to be quite substantial for the next five to 10 years.

The Home Secretary's consultative document described a corps of staff as the

"worst rather than the best of both worlds."

Having read the relevant passages with great care, I do not understand the argument that is advanced in the document. There was no evidence to support it. In our view, a corps of staff would produce the best of the options rather than the worst.

The final argument in support of having a corps of staff relates to costs. It is claimed that the costs of a corps are likely to be greater than those of using police officers who are brought in on a case by case basis from either the

originating force or another force. Unless it is suggested—which it is not—that there should be an enormous standing army of investigators sitting idle at their desks, there is no reason why a corps of investigators directly employed by the commission should be any more expensive than the alternative approach. In our judgment a corps of inspectors would probably be cheaper because directly employed investigators used properly are likely to be cheaper than officers brought in on a contract basis.

As I have said, the more a corps of inspectors establishes its independence the more quickly it can dispose of unmeritorious cases and the more quickly, and with less cost, it can proceed to pursue the serious allegations that come before it.

For perhaps the first three quarters of the century, crime in its formal, legal sense was something that happened to other people. As a result, most people lived their lives with only the most tangential contact with the criminal justice system—for example, perhaps a short period on jury service and one appearance in the magistrates court on a motoring charge.

A culmination of changes in the past two decades has brought crime much closer to the lives of this country's citizens. Crimes of violence used almost always to be perpetrated on victims known to their assailants. Terrorist bomb outrages have made random victims of shoppers, children and passers by—as has football hooliganism, though in a more limited way. Increases in national wealth and consumer spending combined with widening inequalities of income and life's chances, along with the scourge of drug addiction, have led to rocketing levels of crime. Almost everyone these days has experienced crime within their own recent memory, or knows someone who has. People have a much closer and more personal interest in whether the criminal justice system is working for them than ever they did in the past. It is sad that in many respects the criminal justice system is failing. It is not meeting what the public expect of it.

The royal commission was right to draw attention to the

"force of criticisms which can be directed against a thoroughgoing adversarial system which seems to turn a search for the truth into a contest played between opposing lawyers according to a set of rules which the jury does not necessarily accept or even understand."

The police, at the sharp end of the fight against crime, are placed in personal danger in a manner that few of us would accept for ourselves. They are right to draw attention to the failings elsewhere in the criminal justice system, to the increasing public demand for stronger regulation and to the need for higher standards to be exercised by the legal profession.

Of all the failings which can arise within a criminal justice system, none is worse, or more calculated to bring the entire system into disrepute, than a serious miscarriage of justice. The Bill is certainly a great improvement on what has gone before, and we intend to introduce further improvements in Committee. I hope that at that stage Ministers will listen. Had they listened before and accepted the overwhelming need for change years ago, some innocent people might not have had to spend the best years of their lives locked up unjustly for crimes that they did not commit.

4.29 pm

Mr. Kenneth Baker (Mole Valley): I welcome the Bill; I also welcome the news that the Opposition will not divide the House. In matters of this sort, the more that we can proceed with agreement between the parties the better—although I accept that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will table amendments in Committee to reflect his reservations.

The hon. Gentleman reminded us that way back in 1991, on the day when I exercised my powers following the release of the Birmingham Six, I announced the establishment of the royal commission on the criminal justice system. I did so because there was real concern and disquiet about the system, on two counts.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The court decided to release the Birmingham Six.

Mr. Baker: The court made the recommendation that they should be released; they were released, and it was correct for them to be released. My point, however, was that on the same day I announced the establishment of the royal commission.

As I was saying, there was disquiet on two counts. There was disquiet about the fact that in some cases guilty people were not being convicted, and about the fact that in others innocent people were being convicted. The purpose of the criminal justice system is, of course, to convict the guilty, but also to make quite sure that the innocent are acquitted. That is basically why the commission was established, although other matters were referred to it.

During the 1980s, there was an increase in the number of referrals by the Home Secretary to the Court of Appeal on questions relating to whether a verdict was sound. In 1981, one of my predecessors, Lord Whitelaw, referred just one case; but 20 were referred in 1990, 12 in 1991 and 11 in 1992. The number of referrals peaked during those three years.

Mr. Corbyn: Would the right hon. Gentleman care to comment on the difficulty of placing a case before the Home Secretary, ready for referral? Many people's cases are not particularly high-profile in political terms; such people have no influential friends or access to the media, and their cases are often ignored because no one is speaking up for them. Cases involving people who are better able to bring them to the Home Secretary's attention, however, are referred. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that the Bill will provide more equality of access to the Court of Appeal?

Mr. Baker: In short, yes. Before I give a full answer, however, may I describe the procedures that currently operate, which I experienced as Home Secretary?

Most of the cases with which my predecessors—Lord Waddington and the present Foreign Secretary—and I had to deal dated from before the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Many concerned the conduct of the police in questioning suspects at an early stage of inquiries. As the hon. Member for Blackburn pointed out, however, some cases now being referred are subsequent to the Act. I believe that its provisions established proper and effective procedures which, if followed through, eliminate a great deal of the concern expressed in the 1980s about possible miscarriages of justice.

[Mr. Baker]

During the years when I was Home Secretary, I referred 14 cases involving some 19 individuals. Some were high-profile cases: Broadwater Farm, Stefan Kiszko and Judith Ward. Then as now, the Home Office department that dealt with such cases was C3, and I considered some of the officials who answered to me then to be some of the most scrupulous and fair-minded civil servants whom I had encountered. I pay particular tribute to the assistant secretary who headed the department at that time, Mr. Baxter—who has subsequently died—but all the officials in that section of the Home Office were scrupulous, fair and determined to ensure that justice was done. I want to put that on record, because it is sometimes said that cases have been brushed under the carpet or delayed.

I understand from a recent parliamentary question that the average time for dealing with a case is some 36 working days. That is an improvement in some Departments on the way in which letters are dealt with by some Members of Parliament.

Mr. Mullin *rose—*

Mr. Baker: I will pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, later, if I may. There are some cases that take much longer than 36 working days. Some take more than a year, because the investigation is very complicated. Indeed, the cases in which the hon. Gentleman was directly concerned took much longer than a year. That is the system that operates at the moment.

On the recognisability of the case, from the point of view of public concern, in the cases with which I was concerned, the investigation by C3 were the fullest and most scrupulous that I have seen. The dossiers that came to me as Home Secretary were certainly the thickest and one could examine virtually every aspect of the case, so I was satisfied that the investigations were being carried out scrupulously.

I was also satisfied that it was not the correct way of doing it. There are two considerations. First, should a member of the Executive—the Home Secretary in this case—have a role in what, essentially, was a quasi-judicial process? It appeared clear to me that that should not be the case and that that was one of the areas where the powers of the Home Secretary should be conducted by other public bodies.

Secondly, there is, of course, an important constitutional question, which is resolved by the Bill, and which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn touched on. Under the present arrangements of C3, the officials, who are acting on behalf of the Home Secretary, are, of course, restricted from doing certain things, and rightly so. They are not allowed to direct and supervise the inquiry, and I do not think that any hon. Member would ask that they should be, because a moment's reflection would soon reveal that that would be an incredible extension of the powers of the Home Secretary, on behalf of whom they are acting.

In clause 19, the new commission is given the power to direct and supervise an inquiry in a way in which the present officials simply cannot do. It can hold the investigators who are conducting the inquiry much more to account. It can ask them to do certain things. It can direct their inquiries in a way in which civil servants simply would not be allowed to do under the present arrangement, so there is a good constitutional reason for the Bill.

I welcome the various proposals that are contained in the Bill. I welcome the independence of the criminal cases review commission from the Executive of the day—in other words, the Home Secretary. I also welcome its extension to summary cases. As my right hon. and learned Friend reminded the House, the only power that the Home Secretary has where there has been a miscarriage of justice in a magistrates court is to exercise the prerogative of mercy. It fell to me to exercise the prerogative in perhaps two or three cases. Of course, that does not set aside the conviction. The Home Secretary cannot set aside a conviction of a court; only a court can set aside a conviction of a court, and so that remains on the record. That seemed to me to be very wrong and I am glad that it has been corrected by the Bill.

I also welcome the fact that the appeal courts will have the power to ask the commission to examine cases. That is a fallback position, but an important one to have. I understand that the Lord Chief Justice has welcomed that provision.

I also welcome the extension of the powers of the court to consider the sentence as well as the conviction. That will be one of the main reasons for the increase in work load of the commission, because I suspect that many people who feel that they have been wrongly treated in the courts, as regards the conviction and the sentence, will refer their case to the commission.

On investigatory powers—a matter that was raised by the hon. Members for Blackburn and for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)—I share the view of the Runciman committee that there is no practical alternative but to use the police forces, but I think that what the hon. Member for Blackburn said should be looked at carefully by my right hon. and hon. Friends. It is a question of carrying the conviction of the public. In my experience, where police forces were asked—I asked on several occasions—to examine the conduct of another police force, the reports that I got were not cover-ups. They were thorough investigations. The investigations in the celebrated cases that derived from the Irish terrorist cases were undertaken by other police forces and revealed the circumstances that led to the sentences being set aside. I have every confidence that, in general, the police are the right people to do it.

Clause 18 provides that when the commission appoints an investigating officer, he can be either from the force in question or from another force. It would be more appropriate if the general rule were that the investigating officer should be from another force. That may go some way towards meeting the anxieties of the hon. Member for Blackburn.

In principle, I would not go along with the Opposition proposal for another corps of investigators. In effect, such a corps would need to be given full police powers and it would have to be a properly constituted body with all the disciplinary procedures that attach to police forces. That would probably be too elaborate. I hope that the Government will examine my suggestion of an investigating officer from an alternative police force.

In general, I warmly welcome the Bill. As the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn have said, society should not accept a sense injustice in our criminal justice system and people who have been wrongly

convicted spending part of their life in gaol. That should be put right as quickly as possible. When I was Home Secretary, I asked the C3 division to deal with such cases even more promptly because I felt that, if someone had been wrongly convicted and deprived of his liberty, that had to be put right as soon as possible.

4.41 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in welcoming the Bill's proposal for a review commission and especially the removal of responsibility from the Home Office. That will come as a relief not only to victims of alleged miscarriages of justice, but, I suspect, to the Home Office itself.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said, the establishment of a review commission has been suggested by just about everyone who has ever taken a close interest in miscarriages of justice, starting with Lord Devlin in the mid-1970s and continuing through a Select Committee report in 1982, Sir John May's inquiry and the royal commission report. On two occasions, in 1988 and 1990, Sir John Farr and I moved amendments to Government legislation in an attempt to set up a commission. I had a third go last year.

It is in everyone's interest that the commission works. There is a danger that if it becomes trapped in the narrow approach that C3 and the Court of Appeal have adopted in the past it will become discredited and we shall all be back where we started. It is important to try to avoid that.

Hon. Members have spoken about the Police Complaints Authority which the Government seem to regard as a model of how to proceed. I and, I think, some of my hon. Friends regard it as a model of how not to proceed. That body urgently needs some early successes to show that it is different from what has gone before. Cardinal Hume has a letter in today's issue of *The Times* which seems to sum up our hopes for the commission. The letter states:

"This must mark the beginning of a new era in the handling of miscarriage of justice cases. But that requires the commission to be, and be seen to be, a strong body independent of Government, the courts and the police, capable of fulfilling effectively, and with a sense of urgency, the tasks of considering and investigating allegations of miscarriages of justice when appeal rights have been exhausted."

I am afraid that I do not share the rosy view of the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) of the C3 department. I entirely accept that civil servants cannot be held responsible for many of the mistakes that have been made, but in some parts of the Bill I see the dead hand of C3. Perhaps I am being unfair to it and I should blame people higher up in the Home Office hierarchy.

Hon. Members have referred to the insistence that all inquiries be carried out by the police. The commission will not even be obliged to supervise because the relevant clause says that it "may" supervise these inquiries. I shall return to that.

Clause 2 deals with the test for an alleged miscarriage. At present, the Court of Appeal can quash a conviction where there is a lurking doubt—I think that that is the expression used by previous Home Secretaries—that it is safe. Clause 2 proposes to change that to "unsafe" without any qualification. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said, the royal commission suggested that the words "may be unsafe" should be used. Was it intended to make this a stiffer test? If not, why has the wording been changed in clause 2? Likewise, clause 4 uses the expression "capable of belief". I do not understand what is wrong with the existing formula.

The attitude of the Court of Appeal to cases referred back to it will be crucial because the problem has lain not only with the police or the Home Office but with the Court of Appeal. There has been some change in management at that court in the past few years, but before that it contained some of the most closed minds in the land.

The most legendary case was not any of the terrorist cases that have been mentioned but that of two men, Cooper and McMahon, who were wrongly convicted of the murder of a postmaster in Luton. In the 1970s their case was referred back to the Court of Appeal by four successive Home Secretaries. On each occasion the judges just sat stony-faced and said, "Take them away." In the end, the Home Secretary of the day, William Whitelaw, became so exasperated that he simply gave each of the men a railway ticket and sent them home. They were serving life sentences, so that action by Lord Whitelaw shows how exasperated he must have been. Afterwards he wrote to the men's solicitors a long convoluted letter saying that it did not mean this and it did not mean that and divide by the number you first thought of. Clearly, it meant that as early as 1980 the Home Secretary had entirely lost confidence in the ability of the Court of Appeal to face difficult decisions.

The Carl Bridgewater case is probably the longest-running alleged miscarriage of justice still blocked inside the system. I shall refer again to that case. When it came before the Court of Appeal on a reference by the Home Secretary in 1987 or 1988, the judgment on which the appeal was turned down contained the following remarkable passage, which I shall paraphrase. It refers to a prosecution witness called Mervyn Ritter and it states, "We accept that Mr. Ritter is a pathological liar, but on this occasion we believe that he can be relied upon as a witness of truth." I ask you. That is the intellectual level with which we have been grappling in the Court of Appeal in years gone by.

I was present for the appeals in some of the big cases in which convictions were quashed. I was in the Court of Appeal when Lord Lane, through clenched teeth, quashed the Guildford convictions. One was left with the feeling, which was widely remarked on by those of us who were present, that had the Crown Prosecution Service or the Director of Public Prosecutions left Lord Lane the slightest possibility of preserving those convictions, he would have devised some mechanism for doing so despite the fact that the confessions on which they were based had been shown to be forgeries.

Any student of the difficulties must also look at the judgment in the Maguire case. After prolonged public outrage the Maguire convictions were quashed several years ago. But the judges devised a formula—this was the last fling of the old management in the Court of Appeal, but it was fairly recent—whereby they said, "Oh well, perhaps all seven of them had not been making these bombs and they must have been innocently contaminated." To achieve that remarkable feat they invented a magic towel, which no one had claimed existed. The judges said that it might have existed, that all the defendants might have dried their hands on it, and that that was what led to their being contaminated. When

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

we see people with fine intellects behaving in that manner, we realise that there is a problem in the higher reaches of the judiciary.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises that the distortions of the intellectual process by which those conclusions were reached were not all one way in upholding convictions. There is the famous case of Algar in 1954, where Lord Chief Justice Goddard quashed a conviction for forgery, for which the man had been sentenced to five years imprisonment, with the words:

"Do not think that we are doing this because we think you are an innocent man. We do not. We think you are a scoundrel."

Nevertheless, the conviction was quashed.

Mr. Mullin: Perhaps the same might be said of Lord Goddard. I can only comment that if somebody had a conviction quashed by Lord Goddard, he was a very lucky man indeed.

Mr. Corbyn: I was with my hon. Friend when the Guildford Four verdict was announced. Will he bear it in mind that the main problem throughout all the cases of miscarriages of justice has been getting someone to take an interest in them? He, I and, I am sure, many others get hundreds of letters from people, but we have no idea of the justice or otherwise of those cases when we receive them and we lack the ability to investigate.

Is my hon. Friend worried that even under the Home Secretary's proposals, there will still be the problem of the single person rotting away in prison, believing in his own innocence, but having no one outside who is prepared to help him or to give him sound legal advice, and who was probably badly represented in the first place?

Mr. Mullin: I am sure that there will still be such cases, but if the commission works properly—and it is in all our interests to ensure that it does—that will go some way towards resolving the problem. We all receive letters from desperate people who have been writing to everyone they can think of. I hope that the commission will be able to deal with some—although probably not all—of those cases.

Incidentally, I do not complain about the fact that our legal system sometimes makes mistakes. All legal systems make mistakes. My complaint over the years has been that, until now, we have lacked an adequate mechanism for correcting them when it has become obvious to sensible people that a mistake has been made.

There was a sea change in the attitude of the Appeal Court following the early retirement of Lord Lane and the Birmingham appeal judgment—and, of course, the Judith Ward judgment, which in a way marks the high point of that change. I have heard it suggested by distinguished barristers that the door may be closing again now that the pressure is off. I hope that that is not the case. I also hope that, when convictions are quashed, there will be no more whispering judges, occasionally even popping up on television programmes, suggesting that although there may have been some technical reason for quashing the case, the accused really did it. I hope that that will not happen again, especially among those whose job it is to uphold the rule of law.

I welcome what the Home Secretary said about appointments to the commission. I had intended to make the point, which he made first, that the jobs for the 11 commissioners should be advertised and should be subject to an open interview process in which we can all have confidence. Who is appointed will be crucial to the credibility of the commission. With respect to people who serve on other quangos—and the commission will be a quango—those who serve on the commission will need to be from a slightly different school from some of the people who serve on other quangos. I am putting that point as generously as possible. In particular, there will need to be among the 11 members—and, indeed, among the staff whom they employ—people with a track record of scepticism towards the official version of events.

It was not the C3 department, the Court of Appeal or the police that first alerted the world to the problem; it was people with no direct responsibility. In many cases, they were journalists employed by television companies. Of course, it is always right that in a democracy there is a role for journalists in putting right alleged injustices, but it cannot be satisfactory for any of those associated with the criminal justice system to realise that it has come to depend on such people.

I mention a few people who I think should be considered for the commission. I do so at the risk of damning their chances should they be interested in the job. First, I mention Sir Ludovic Kennedy—

Mr. Straw: He went to a good school.

Mr. Mullin: I do not know which school he went to, but he is a distinguished person with a long and honourable track record that goes back long before miscarriages of justice had a high public profile. I should also like someone of the calibre of Mr. Paul Foot to serve on the commission. I appreciate that his politics may not necessarily appeal to either Front Bench, but—

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): He went to a good school.

Mr. Mullin: Yes, he went to a good school. He has a track record second to very few contemporary journalists in his pursuit of unpopular causes such as miscarriages of justice. Should he be interested, I hope that his application will be seriously considered.

I also have in mind Mr. David Jessel, who heads the "Just Television" programme. Again, he has a distinguished track record in drawing the attention of the nation to cases that are not necessarily popular, but need to be examined.

In talking about the composition of the commission, the royal commission said that the chairman should not be a judge. I did not hear the Home Secretary say that he would not be. It would be nice to hear the Minister say so when he replies to the debate. I say with all due respect to anyone who happens to be a judge that it is important that the new body demonstrates its independence not only the Executive but the judiciary.

I was surprised to note in clause 9 a provision to give the commission the power to deal with sentences. I do not feel very strongly about that, but I had never envisaged it being the case. I wonder whether there is a danger that the commission will become flooded with such cases, some of them spurious.

The commission's remit extends to England, Wales and, I am glad to note, Northern Ireland. I appreciate that this is not the Minister's responsibility, but I want to know what will happen in Scotland. There is a certain smugness about the Scottish legal system. When the English legal system was in great difficulty, on several occasions distinguished Scottish lawyers came creeping up to me saying, "Of course, this would never happen in Scotland." I think that it could happen; indeed, there have been a number of cases where it has happened. I know from my postbag that a few Scottish cases deserve to go before the commission. Perhaps the Minister will tell us the plans for Scotland.

The royal commission noted that there was a problem with evidence that would not be admissible before a court. Chapter 10, paragraph 67, states:

"It is undesirable that the Court of Appeal should in effect be precluded by the current rules of evidence from considering an alleged wrongful conviction. We therefore attach great importance to the review of the rules of evidence by the Law Commission that we have recommended."

I would be grateful to know whether that commission will be permitted to deal with inadmissible evidence and whether there are any plans—if there are, the Bill would be the obvious place for them—for loosening the constraints on the Court of Appeal in considering evidence that might otherwise be inadmissible. Hearsay evidence is an obvious example, and the royal commission dealt with that in paragraphs 25 and 26 of chapter 8. It took the view that

"in general, the fact that a statement is hearsay should mean that the court places rather less weight on it, but not that it should be inadmissible in the first place."

It said that it would be satisfactory for a judge simply to draw the attention of the jury, or of judges if it is an appeal case, to the fact that less weight should be placed on hearsay evidence.

I do not suppose that the problem with hearsay evidence will arise all that often. There was, however, a problem in the Birmingham case. A Member of Parliament had written a book that contained interviews with the persons who had carried out the bombings. He had had better luck tracking down those persons than the people whose job it was to track them down. I sat through the appeal case. Prosecution lawyers for the Crown and lawyers for the defendants all had a copy of that book in front of them. Everyone was aware of it, but none of the book could be referred to, even though it contained a more compelling point than the minutiae of the forensic or the confession evidence.

The Bill is silent on the subject of inadmissible evidence. This is a golden opportunity to amend the law along the lines recommended by the royal commission, if the Government are disposed to consider favourably its suggestion.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if such evidence cannot be presented to a jury, it would be wrong for it to be allowed to be referred to in the Court of Appeal? In a sense, the jury's verdict could be undercut on the basis of evidence that it had not heard or considered.

Mr. Mullin: In all cases, jurors' evidence will be undercut if material comes to light that was not before them at the original trial. That is what happens in cases that go to the Court of Appeal. That is why many convictions are quashed. I am arguing only that common sense should be applied and that the Court of Appeal or the commission should not be prevented from doing their job by having to take too narrow a view of their remit.

The heart of the Bill is the capacity to conduct independent investigations, or rather the fact that the commission will not be able to conduct such investigations. Clause 19 says that commissioners may supervise inquiries carried out by police officers. In the light of all we know, it is incredible that the commissioners will be dependent on police officers and that they are advised only to supervise investigations. I hope that the calibre of the commissioners will be such that they will want to take a detailed interest in the way in which investigations are undertaken.

It is no part of my case that all police inquiries are dishonest. As other people have remarked, no doubt exists that honest police inquiries conducted by Devon and Cornwall police in the Birmingham case, and by Avon and Somerset police in the Guildford case, finally brought those cases to an end. I am sorry to say, however, that there were at least three police inquiries into the Birmingham case before it was brought to an end.

The Devon and Cornwall police inquiry was their second go at it. When the two superintendents conducting the first inquiry came to see me in the House in 1987, their heart did not seem to be entirely in the job. I had to draw their attention to one or two things that they should have noticed. I told them that unless they tried harder than they appeared to be trying, we would be all be back in two or three years' time going over the same ground again. Sure enough, we were. Happily, the second inquiry was led by the chief constable, who took a close interest and insisted on an honest and detailed inquiry. That did not happen the first time.

These inquiries are extremely expensive. Enormous amounts of public money have been wasted on what in some cases are bogus inquiries. The Carl Bridgewater case is the most relevant in that regard. It is now undergoing its eighth police inquiry. I have a list of them. In 1980 and 1981, Cheshire constabulary conducted two inquiries. In 1983, 1984 and 1985, Greater Manchester police conducted three inquiries—that is five altogether. In 1986, Warwickshire constabulary conducted an inquiry. That led to the case being reopened and referred to the Court of Appeal, with the remarkable quotation that I cited earlier.

In 1991, Merseyside police were appointed to conduct an inquiry. In 1994, Merseyside police were reappointed to conduct an inquiry. It does not appear to be getting very far. Amateurs appear to be more successful at turning up new evidence in this case than any of the eight police inquiries that have taken place. There comes a moment when one must recognise that police inquiries in such cases are not going to lead anywhere. One must bite the bullet and do something about it.

There is the case of Mr. Brian Parsons, who, in my view, has been wrongly convicted of the murder of an old woman in Axminster, Devon. The Home Secretary has appointed the force that originally investigated that case, Devon and Cornwall police, to re-examine it. As we all agree, that police force conducted honest and thorough inquiries in the Birmingham case second time around and, I think, in the Darvell brothers case first time around, but it has made it clear to anyone who has ears that it will not pursue the Brian Parsons case. It went even to the lengths

[Mr. Mullin]

of inviting the journalist who has taken a close interest in the case to Devon for an informal chat in a pub, where the assistant chief constable, Mr. Portlock, made that plain.

Mr. Portlock appeared to overlook the fact that the journalist might then talk to me, and that I might mention what had been said in Parliament, which I did the next day. A couple of days after that, the journalist from the *Western Morning News* received an anonymous telephone call telling him that I had an undeclared interest—my name appears on the notepaper of the "Just Television" programme. That is an unpaid interest from which I gain absolutely nothing. That information could have come only from someone connected with the inquiry. That is how Devon and Cornwall police are dealing with the Brian Parsons case, and it does not inspire confidence.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said, resources are being wasted. Millions of pounds have been wasted on phoney police inquiries that are not intended to go anywhere. It would be cheaper to give the commission the power to conduct some of its own investigations. Some of the police inquiries have proved extremely wasteful. Enormous amounts of money have been spent interviewing people who did not need to be interviewed.

In some cases, the results of the inquiries—I think of the reinvestigation by West Midlands police into the Birmingham pub bombings—were selectively leaked to national newspapers in an attempt to rescue some of their friends, who were on trial for misbehaviour. I repeat what I said earlier to the Home Secretary and what he does not accept: to insist that only the police are capable of inquiring into misbehaviour by police officers flies in the face of just about all the advice that he has received from people who have a first-hand interest in these matters. I do not accept the royal commission's rather reluctant conclusion that there is no practical alternative.

The deputation that Cardinal Hume leads takes a close interest in these matters and may share my views, if his letter in *The Times* today is anything to go by. I note that that deputation contains two former Home Secretaries and one Law Lord, so I do not feel entirely alone on the point that it is sufficient to leave such matters to the police. I cannot understand why the Home Secretary clings to that view. It cannot be on grounds of cost. That policy is more expensive. He may cling to it out of misplaced loyalty to the police, but nor is it in the interests of the police that we continue with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn was generous when he discussed the role of the police in these matters and said that he was not referring to the 99.9 per cent. of police officers who were honest. I think that 99.9 per cent. is a little on the high side; I put it no more strongly than that. I am sorry to say that in some police forces, especially in elite detective squads—I know that many Conservative Members are concerned about this, because they have privately expressed this view to me—a culture of perjury grew up over the years. One senior police officer referred to it as noble cause corruption. He meant that if the goal was thought to be worthy, the means did not matter very much.

I well remember that, at the height of the various scandals involving the Birmingham, Guildford and Judith Ward cases, I attended a reception at the Police Federation. A senior member of the federation executive said to me quietly in the corner, "There is nothing wrong with perjury committed by an honest police officer in support of a good cause." That thinking reflects—[HON. MEMBERS: "To you?"] Yes, he said it to me of all people.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: He must have been drunk.

Mr. Mullin: He was perfectly sober.

I am afraid to say that such thinking has infected many police inquiries. It is not right to say that we are talking only about the odd police officer. I repeat that I accept that there are many honest police officers who are as concerned as the rest of us about what has gone on. However, the Guildford and Woolwich cases and the Birmingham case involved fraud and perjury on a massive scale. It was carefully co-ordinated. Police officers must have sat in lecture halls and worked out what they intended to do to get it right.

The fraud and perjury involved officers ranging in rank from detective constable to assistant chief constable. In the Birmingham case, two of the officers who were involved in the investigations and the subsequent cover-up became chief constables. In those circumstances, one cannot expect a police inquiry into the activities of other police officers necessarily to lead to the right result, especially in cases of such seriousness.

I now turn to the transition period. The commission will not be set up for a while and there are a number of cases in the in-tray of the Home Secretary which should not wait until it is set up and running. The obvious one, to which I have already referred, is the Carl Bridgewater case. I take the Carl Bridgewater case and the handling of it as a litmus test of the new seriousness that is alleged to be abroad on the issue. It is a litmus test of whether we are serious in facing up to things that have gone wrong.

The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) said that he attempted to speed up the consideration of cases in which people had been in prison for a long time. Two of the defendants in the Bridgewater case have been in prison for more than half their lives. The case against them has comprehensively collapsed. The foreman of the jury at the trial has been on national television saying that the jury would never have convicted if they had known what is known today. Surely the time has come to draw a line under the case. I hope that the Carl Bridgewater case will not have to wait until the commission is set up. I say the same thing about the Brian Parsons case, to which I have already referred.

If the Bill is handled properly, it represents an opportunity to put behind us the bleak period in the history of British justice of the past few years. I hope that the opportunity will not be thrown away. The Home Office must have noticed that Labour Front-Bench Members are approaching the Bill in a generous spirit. We do so in the hope that the Government—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that the Minister is not even listening. I hope that I may have his attention for a moment.

Those of us who care about the issue are treating the Bill seriously and not in a party political way, because the issues involved cut across political parties. One of the great strengths of the campaigns against alleged miscarriages of justice is that it has always been possible, even in the darkest circumstances and at the most difficult times, to attract support across the House. The alliance between me and the former Member for Harborough is the starkest illustration of that proposition.

Labour will not oppose the Second Reading, because we want the Minister to take seriously some of the criticisms that have been made. We hope that the Committee stage will not turn into an adversarial process, such as we see in the courts, in which both sides try to outwit each other. We hope that we can come to conclusions that will set up a commission which will endure for many years to come and which will not easily be discredited.

5.14 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I welcome the Bill, which is important if we are to maintain public good will and confidence in the criminal justice system. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has done a great deal to bring to the attention of the House and of the country at large miscarriages of justice—

Mr. Corbyn: That is not what was said at the time.

Mr. Heald: As a barrister, I am willing to give credit to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South for bringing to the attention of the criminal justice system and of the public cases such as that of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, which have been dealt with on appeal. I agree that it was a sad reflection on the system that it took so long for those people to have their convictions quashed.

It is important to realise that the culture in the law is based on a reluctance to change the results of trials by jury except in the most exceptional circumstances. The role of the jury is seen by lawyers as very much the gold standard. They feel that it is important that 12 good men and true have listened to the evidence in the case, have heard the arguments and have been there during the adversarial contest, which is often very much criticised but which involves testing the evidence and ensuring that each argument is put to the test.

I still believe strongly that our Crown court, with the judge and jury working together—the judge as judge of the law and the jury as judge of the facts—has a special place, and that we undermine it at our peril. Although I welcome the Bill as dealing with issues of public good will and confidence, and as bringing a measure of improvement to the system, I do not think that we should lightly criticise our jury system. It is wrong to throw out the baby with the bath water. That is why I especially welcomed the comments of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who seemed to take that point very much on board, as does my hon. Friend the Minister.

The three tests that the Court of Appeal has applied—whether the conviction is unsafe or unsatisfactory, whether there has been a mistake in the law, and whether there has been a material irregularity during the trial—are three aspects of the same test: whether the conviction is unsafe. To move under the Bill to a simple test of whether the conviction is unsafe is right. I know nobody who can tell me the difference between an unsafe conviction and an unsatisfactory one. Any decision that is wrong in law or which involves a material irregularity is, by its nature, unsafe. A simpler and more straightforward test is very much to be welcomed.

I am concerned about the remarks by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South about inadmissible evidence. If we say, as we should, that hearsay evidence should not be sufficient to prove a case in court, it is inconsistent to say that one can present hearsay evidence to the court if it may show that an aspect of the prosecution case is faulty. It is not evidence that can be tested. With the best will in the world, if the hon. Gentleman had given evidence to the Crown court in the case to which he referred, and if he had said, "I have spoken to others who admit the offence," how could the evidence have been tested? He would say, "I believed them." But how does a jury get to the root of that and decide what the truth is?

It is different from the normal situation when the members of the jury can see the man or woman who is giving evidence, can see their reactions to detailed, probing questions, who can see their body language and who can even see the look of fear that sometimes strikes a witness when the question goes in, the groundwork having been laid. That is what concerns me, because the hon. Member for Sunderland, South would get rid of the law of evidence as it relates to hearsay evidence. That law has protected defendants, and I believe that it exists for a good reason. I hope that he will reconsider his suggestion.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I follow what my hon. Friend is saying, but did he support the ability of the Attorney-General to refer cases of inadequate sentence to the Court of Appeal? If he did, he accepted that Court of Appeal judges, who were not present at a trial and unable to see the witnesses' faces and the way in which they gave evidence, should be able to do something about the sentence, contrary to that which the judge at the trial had considered to be right.

Mr. Heald: As usual, my hon. and learned Friend makes an important point. There is a difference between deciding guilt and innocence and deciding a disposal in a case. My hon. and learned Friend should consider the test that a barrister would apply when deciding whether to advise that a case should go to appeal on the question of sentence. In those circumstances, the barrister must consider whether the sentence is completely out of the ball park, to use a slang expression, and thus obviously light when compared with the crime.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Is my hon. Friend aware that, before section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 came into force, the Court of Appeal regularly heard appeals from defendants who said that their sentences were too heavy? Section 36 merely redressed the balance in favour of the public, so that someone could appeal on behalf of the public if the sentence was thought to be too lenient.

Mr. Heald: I agree with my hon. Friend that it was right to redress the balance.

A barrister would appeal a modest sentence only when he thought that it was quite outlandish that the judge had imposed such a modest sentence in a serious case. There is a difference between taking a view in principle about whether any case of that sort should warrant a sentence so low and looking at the niceties of the case, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) suggested, and saying that one did not have all the details of the evidence. I do not think that lawyers can employ that test when deciding whether such cases should be appealed on the grounds of sentence.

Even if it could be argued that the jury would not be compromised by being presented with what is currently inadmissible hearsay evidence and by being put in the difficult position of having to judge the strength or weakness of evidence when that jury cannot hear the

[Mr. Heald]

person say what that evidence is, it would still be wrong if such evidence could be presented at the Court of Appeal stage. If that happened, the role of the jury would be undercut.

The jury may have heard admissible evidence and made a decision on the basis of evidence given by witnesses, but the would then be told, "Yes, you heard all that and made your decision, but we are prepared to overrule you on the basis of what somebody said somebody else had said." I do not think that that would add to the quality of justice in either direction. It would not mean that innocent people subjected to a miscarriage of justice would have their convictions quashed more often on appeal, or that the public would see those who are guilty more readily convicted and with full justice.

Although I understand the call for an elite corps, an Eliot Ness brigade of fighters for justice, I am concerned that an esprit de corps might be fostered in such a force. That would not be healthy. According to the Bill, the supervision and direction of the investigators is in the hands of the commission. The officers used to conduct investigations would be fresh faces and would not serve on each investigation. That means that there would be a turnover of investigative staff, who would look at the issues with a fresh eye. I would have imagined that Opposition Members would also want that type of staff.

Mr. Mullin: I agree that it is not necessary to have an elite corps employed by the commission, but what about the complaint made by Cardinal Hume in his letter today that the commission merely has a reserve power to instigate its investigations on an ad hoc basis?

Mr. Heald: That argument could be considered in Committee, but I would not want the Bill to give the commission additional powers or to create an elite force. That would not be necessary to achieve a proper investigation of cases. If a particular police force is being impeached in an investigation, there is no reason why another force cannot adequately provide investigators to look into the issues thoroughly. If expert evidence is required, the Bill provides powers for experts to be called in, tests to be done and expert inquiries to be made.

I find it difficult to see what would be achieved by giving the commission greater powers. If one held to the conspiracy theory that every police officer in the country in every force would be prepared to perjure himself to maintain a false conviction, that argument might have some force. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South has not suggested that, however, and has paid credit to police forces who have had to investigate difficult cases. The commission's power to direct and supervise the investigators is at the centre of the Bill, so I find it hard to understand why an elite force of investigators would be needed. They might run the danger of becoming rather sceptical as they investigated case after case after case. Its officers might even become case-hardened to pleas about miscarriages of justice. I am not sure that that force would necessarily work in the way suggested, and it might even be counter-productive.

We must not forget that the police have an up-to-date fund of knowledge of investigative techniques and a proper sense of direction when asking questions of witnesses and testing evidence. They also have a network of intelligence available to them. When the size and scope of an inquiry requires it, the police have available to them a wide range of resources to get at the truth. As has already been said, the inquiries are not always small ones requiring the examination of just a few witnesses; it is often necessary to trawl through mountains of evidence. Therefore, I believe that the present balance is about right.

The Police Complaints Authority has been criticised, but it is not quite correct to make an analogy between the authority and the new commission. The Police Complaints Authority has a different role, because it considers the way in which the police have behaved in particular cases on a disciplinary basis. That is a different kettle of fish from looking at a case which resulted in conviction and deciding whether fresh evidence has come to light or an argument was not been fully presented in court.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South may have complaints about the Police Complaints Authority with which I probably would not agree, but we are not talking about the same type of operation. Given the type of operation suggested by the Bill, the involvement of the police—provided that they are supervised and directed independently—has a lot to be said for it.

The hon. Member for Blackburn said that the Police Complaints Authority lacked public confidence because more cases arising from it are being brought before the courts. The reason is obvious: a lot of people who claim to have been wronged want a money judgment and substantial compensation for what they claim has happened. That is why they go to court. The number of appeals has risen in the current climate because courts are now prepared to hear those cases and to decide them in a way that they might not have been prepared to do a few years ago.

I do not believe that journalists should act as investigators in those cases. I have the greatest respect for journalists, who have rightly brought many cases to the public's attention, but they are not qualified to prepare a case for the Court of Appeal or to go into the detailed issues of admissibility of evidence and procedural irregularities. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South will have heard all the fine details argued in the Court of Appeal by extremely capable barristers acting for the appellants, and he knows that the niceties are dealt with in the Court of Appeal. Does he really think that journalists have the necessary skills to do that?

Mr. Mullin: No one is suggesting that they have. As the Home Secretary made clear, about a third of the members of the commission will be qualified lawyers, whom I would expect to help out in the event of a case being sent to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman addresses a different point. I understood that his earlier point was that the investigators—those preparing cases for referral to the Court of Appeal—should include journalists. The skills necessary to prepare those cases for the Court of Appeal are not held by journalists. They are held by police officers, who are trained to take statements and look at the details of the law as they prepare a case. This, however, is different.

I particularly welcome the provisions dealing with magistrates courts. For too long, minor offences such as failing to have a motor insurance certificate—such offences, though important, are minor in the overall scheme of things when compared with the serious cases that we have discussed—have inundated the Crown court

every day of the week. In case after case, the appellant turns up with his or her insurance certificate, and the appeal is allowed. The simple procedure that the Bill introduces will refer such cases back to the magistrates courts so that the document can simply be produced, whatever the plea, and the matter regularised.

The commission will want to review some magistrates court cases. Although they do not involve large sums of money and are not the most serious cases, they often involve an individual's reputation. We all know of magistrates court cases where tremendous stress has been caused as a result of conviction and loss of character. I welcome the fact that those cases can now be considered by the commission, taken back to court and dealt with speedily.

I am pleased to welcome the Bill and shall support it today.

5.32 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Liberal Democrats very much welcome the Bill. Indeed, when the Gracious Speech setting out the Government's legislative programme made no mention of it, we immediately sought an assurance from the Home Secretary that he had every intention of introducing it during the current Session. That assurance was forthcoming, and we told him that we wanted the Bill to make rapid progress.

The Bill is long overdue. A small number of miscarriages of justice have brought discredit on the system as a whole and caused a great deal of hardship. One thinks especially of the Stefan Kiszko case, which brought about a great deal of human misery. As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, for all those who are wrongly convicted, others go free and are not pursued because a miscarriage of justice has occurred.

The criticisms and reservations that I make do not represent reasons for delaying the Bill. They are simply ways in which the Bill can be improved as it is considered in more detail. The foremost issue is that of the new commission's independence from the judiciary, the Home Secretary and the Government. Although considerable attempts have been made to safeguard that independence in the format of the Bill, much will depend on who is appointed to the commission.

It is not yet clear whether the chairman will be a member of the judiciary. The Home Secretary did not refer to that, and I should be interested to know, at the close of the debate, whether the Government think that it would be inappropriate for a current member of the judiciary to switch to that post. There is widespread feeling that the chairman should be drawn from another direction—perhaps from the legal profession but not from the judiciary.

There must be a good choice of members of the commission, and the commission needs to be properly resourced. Today, the Government set out the procedures for advertising those posts. Those procedures are welcome and come as a new venture for Ministers. After all, only a week ago they appointed 76-year-old Lord Wyatt chairman of the Tote Board on a salary of £90,000 a year, without advertising for, or considering, other candidates. So the Government have turned over a new leaf this week and now propose to advertise posts. I hope that they are not surprised if we are a little cynical and suspicious about whether they will really do that, as bad habits seem to be firmly entrenched in Home Office practice.

The second crucial issue is the carrying out of investigations: who will do it and how? I broadly agree with the Government that police officers will be essential to the effective work of the commission. The pool of knowledge, ability, experience and training to do that job as well as it would be done by police officers simply does not exist outside the police service. It is therefore a question of the mechanism and structure in which police officers will be used for that purpose and whether we should go beyond the use of serving police officers and use retired police officers in some circumstances. Although alternative structures for that exist, the use of police officers will be essential.

The arrangements proposed do not even precisely follow those of the Police Complaints Authority, which is open to less criticism than has been made. A system whereby direct supervision is by a member of the authority, who is obviously not associated with the police, has considerable advantages. There would be some merit in getting closer to that format, but other methods could also be employed. We could have an established framework of officers who work directly for the commission, perhaps occasionally seconding more junior officers to it for periods of work.

I am a little reluctant about the setting up of a new national squad as a result of the commission, because one has a feeling that national squads come heavily under the influence of the Metropolitan police. That might not be an appropriate model and the Government must be a little cautious about the formula. I am not satisfied with the assumption that the commission will set in train an investigation, the chief constable will say, "I have a man who can do that," and only in exceptional circumstances will the commission say, "We would rather have it done by another force." That is how the Bill appears.

The prevailing assumption should be that the investigation will be done from outside and therefore normally by another force and, where several forces have been involved in the original investigation and the commission feels that a free-standing group should investigate it in an exceptional case, by a unit to which officers can be seconded. The Government must look more carefully at alternative structures for using police officers, although I believe that police officers are essential for the conduct of those investigations.

Cost is an important issue when we consider how investigations are carried out. I do not know how Ministers can stand by the financial memorandum to the Bill, which says:

"it is not anticipated that the Bill will give rise to any extra demands on police resources."

If the commission is to direct an investigation to be carried out, if those investigations are sometimes more thorough than those carried out under the direction of the Home Office previously—in some cases, they will have to be, because they will go over cases already dealt with by the Home Office—and if there is an initial rush of cases, as the Government anticipate in resourcing the commission, there will inevitably be pressure on police authorities' resources.

Many police forces suffer from underfunding, not least because of the problems of the funding of police pensions, to which I have directed the Minister's attention before. Police authorities are, for the first time, open to capping—there are directly capped police authorities.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

Clearly, there will initially be many extra inquiries. The police forces will have to follow the commission's directions on how to conduct the investigations—which may, rightly, be very demanding. I cannot accept that that will not place extra demands upon police resources. If we were to say that, we would be assuming that nothing would be done any better, more thoroughly or more extensively than was done in the past year under the present system. If that is what the Home Secretary is saying, he had better say openly that nothing will be done more thoroughly because the level of investigation will not cost one penny more than it did in the current year.

I am making a distinction between the costs of investigation and those for the administration of the commission. The Government have provided resources for the commission in recognition that it will be more expensive than the smaller Home Office unit. They have openly recognised and assumed that there will be many additional cases in the earlier years.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I am intrigued by the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion that cases are not being looked at thoroughly now, and that when the system changes and there is a criminal cases review commission, the police will consider cases much more thoroughly. He implies that the police are not thorough at present. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that that is not the case. When the police are asked to investigate, they do so very thoroughly.

Mr. Beith: The point has already been made in the debate that a degree of direction by the commission over the police force will apply in future which did not apply in the case of the Home Office. As the former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) said, it would have been thought inappropriate in the case of the Home Office. The new system is bound to give rise to extra demands.

Ministers have conceded that there will be more cases. What will the Minister say when several chief constables say to him that he has told them not to spend one penny more on investigations under the new system than they did under the direction of the Home Office, but current investigations are costing them more? Will the Minister say that that will be taken into account in the financial arrangements of police authorities?

It is simply not a tenable proposition to say that the new system will not cost one penny more for the police forces who are doing the spadework. If that were so, the new investigation system would be second-rate—I do not think that that is the Government's intention or what the Bill provides for. I am sure that no self-respecting commission would put up with that. There will be a degree of thoroughness that will cost money, but the Government have not taken account of that.

Clause 2 requires the Court of Appeal to allow an appeal where a conviction is unsafe, but the royal commission suggested quashing convictions that may be unsafe. There is a certain neat logic: to the logical mind, a conviction is either safe or unsafe. If it may be unsafe, it is unsafe—there should not be a reason for a middle category. However, many experienced people believe that narrowing the test will make it significantly more restrictive.

In people's minds there is a lurking doubt that the conviction may be unsafe rather than actually being unsafe. That fear that a more restrictive test than that proposed by the royal commission will exist in practice constitutes another of the worries about the Bill. The Government rightly prayed in aid the royal commission and all the work that it did. It must be a matter of concern that the test appears to be narrower.

There are also concerns about disclosure of evidence. The commission has extensive powers to demand information, but the Home Office department C3 is exempted from the disclosure requirements. It is even possible that the commission will unintentionally and unnecessarily repeat C3 investigations and analysis, which could be expensive. The Bill places no explicit obligation on the commission to release evidence on which appeal application has been denied. That has previously been judged as unfair under the present system because it denies the appellant the opportunity to question the evidence on which his application is refused.

Clause 23 sets out exceptions to the duty of confidentiality, but no overt requirement for disclosure in such circumstances. That issue requires further attention.

Although anxieties remain about ensuring the independence of the body, about the structure by which we use police officers in investigations, about the costs to police authorities and other matters, the Bill is welcome. I hope that it will soon be on the statute book and in operation.

5.44 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The sheer size and complexity of the Bill is the complete answer to those who criticised my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for being slow to bring before the House a measure to end miscarriages of justice. With no draft scheme recommended by the Runciman royal commission and no unanimity about many of the details, a period of consultation followed by close consideration was vital, and took time. We have had enough bad legislation placed on the statute book in haste to justify the careful consideration that the Bill has been given. My right hon. and learned Friend is to be congratulated on producing a worthy Bill that will go a long way towards restoring public confidence in our criminal justice system.

I have reservations about the detail, but I hope that nothing that I say will be taken as a vote of no confidence in the Bill, which takes a substantial step forward. It is just possible that the Bill may be improved between now and its final passing if attention is paid to the various points raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

We have already taken considerable steps to ensure that there are many fewer miscarriages of justice than in the past. Tape-recorded interviews have been the greatest single contribution towards the improvement of the criminal justice system. They are now in force, working well and helping to raise the standing and appreciation of police officers' work. Police officers are no longer being constantly attacked for dishonesty in every criminal case because the truth of what was actually said is recorded in the tape recorded interviews. Where those tape-recorded interviews amount to nothing, the burden is placed much more firmly on the prosecution to produce other good evidence of guilt. That in itself tends to reduce the possibility of miscarriages of justice.

The independent Crown Prosecution Service standardises the prosecution of offenders and removes the bias previously thought to exist when the police prosecuted. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 lays down strict criteria governing the production of police evidence and acts as a deterrent to police wrongdoing. That is a saving factor against miscarriages of justice.

Another development has been electrostatic document analysis, which detects inconsistencies and has helped to bring to a more satisfactory conclusion terrorist cases involving miscarriages of justice. There have been improvements in forensic science investigation. There is judicial recognition of the possibility of identification error, which has led to judges having to give guidance to juries about being careful with any identification evidence. We have also seen improvements in the training of barristers and the sharpening of the facility to cross-examine—one of the strongest defences against miscarriage of justice. There have also been improvements in the training of judges to alert them to the possibility of miscarriages of justice.

All those factors have made miscarriages of justice much less likely to occur today than was the case in the 1970s. However, we must continue to improve the processes of investigation and trial to avoid unjust convictions. The provisions in the Bill to improve the work of the Court of Appeal have made a substantial contribution towards improving the system. The court has not always been able to detect miscarriages of justice, so improvements in the appeal stages were recommended by the royal commission chaired by Lord Runciman and form an important part of the Bill.

If the Court of Appeal suspects a miscarriage of justice, it has limited powers. It can quash a conviction or order a retrial. It is perhaps sensible to simplify the overlapping grounds on which at present a Court of Appeal can allow an appeal—because the verdict is unsafe or unsatisfactory, or there has been a wrong decision in law, or there was a material irregularity in the trial—to one test, of whether the verdict is unsafe. However, that depends on what "unsafe" means.

Let me take some examples of the problems that are likely to arise. A verdict may be unsafe because there comes to light evidence that would be inadmissible in law because it is hearsay, as in the case of Algar, about which I intervened with the judgment of Lord Chief Justice Goddard in the speech of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), or because it is inadmissible under section 76 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

What is the position as far as the Court of Appeal is concerned? Is the criminal cases review commission able to refer to it that type of evidence which might throw doubt on the safety of a conviction? I shall return to that later.

There is the other side of the coin. Let us suppose that the Court of Appeal says, "We have no doubt that the man is guilty on all the evidence, but the police lied about the circumstances in which they took the confession and, had the jury known that the police were lying about that, we cannot say that the jury would not have decided that the police were lying about other parts of their evidence; so we quash the conviction." The Court of Appeal would in effect be saying that the conviction was safe, but that it was thoroughly unsatisfactory, and therefore would quash the conviction because it was unsatisfactory. However, we have deleted the requirement that the conviction be unsatisfactory as a basis for quashing a conviction.

Would such a defendant remain convicted in circumstances in which, at present, his conviction is quashed? It may well be a matter of pure justice that he should be convicted although the trial was unsatisfactory, but nevertheless obviously a problem is likely to arise unless we define better and more clearly what we mean by the word "unsafe".

There are also cases now in which the Court of Appeal says that a verdict is unsafe and unsatisfactory, yet the proviso is applied saying that nevertheless the conviction should stand. Common sense says that, if a conviction is unsafe, it should not stand, and it should not be allowed to stand simply because the reason for saying that it is unsafe is trivial. A conviction is either safe or unsafe. If it is unsafe, it should not stand. There should be no question of any proviso. Is not the logic of that that the proviso should be abolished? Will my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary consider doing that in the Bill?

It is constructive that clause 4 lowers the threshold for the admission of fresh evidence from the standard of whether it is likely to be credible to whether it is capable of belief. However, in my opinion, it would be a great pity if the opportunity were not taken to allow the court to include any relevant or material evidence capable of belief that is not produced at the trial, even when the reason was negligence or error of judgment by the defendant's legal advisers, provided that it had not been deliberately left until the appeal before being produced. It always appears to me to be terribly unjust that the faults of legal advisers or counsel at the trial should lead to the quashing of a conviction.

Perhaps it is not necessary to include it in the legislation, but it might help to reduce the miscarriages of justice if the Court of Appeal used its power to order a retrial more frequently then it does, in circumstances where fresh evidence would require a jury's verdict and no harm would be done because of passage of time or the sensitivity of victims or even perhaps the sensitivity of the defendant.

I have perhaps said enough in a Second Reading speech to show that there may be problems with the wording of clause 2. I have had the privilege of reading a draft article by Professor Sir John Smith QC, who raises other doubts in addition to those, and I would advise my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to consider its contents before going firm on that clause.

The Society of Conservative Lawyers sub-committee on criminal justice and miscarriages of justice, which I was privileged to chair, said in its evidence to Lord Runciman that it was undesirable that miscarriages of justice, which were essentially a legal matter, should involve the Home Secretary so closely. Although all fair-minded and unbiased people would accept that there has been no reason for supposing that successive Home Secretaries have been other than impartial, the belief is sometimes fostered by Opposition Members and others that decisions were political. Media pressure and the representations of archbishops and others often appear to influence such references back to the Court of Appeal.

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

Further, the Home Secretary's guidelines appear to say that positive proof of innocence would almost need to be required before the Home Secretary refers cases back. As such references are based on the papers in the case, and the papers seldom show police dishonesty or wrong conclusions drawn by forensic scientists or eye-witness error, it is obviously sensible that that whole murky business of the Home Secretary's part in referring matters back should be cleared up once and for all. It follows that I very much welcome clause 3, which abolishes the need for the Home Secretary to refer cases to the Court of Appeal.

Potentially, the most important contribution of the Bill to the reduction of the number of cases in which an innocent person is wrongfully convicted is the establishment of the criminal cases review commission. That was recommended by all the people who have been mentioned, and by the Society of Conservative Lawyers in its evidence to Lord Runciman, as an additional filter to avoid injustice, because we did not think that the Court of Appeal was suited to perform the functions that we had in mind.

We recommended just such a board or commission as is contained in the Bill, but we made an addition that does not appear in the legislation. We said:

"A properly funded organisation would be needed under a Director adequately staffed by solicitors, investigators (who could be former police officers), accountants, computer experts and forensic scientists. They should be able to seek assistance from outside bodies. There must be access to relevant police and prosecution files and the body must have full investigative powers. Advice and directions could be given by a panel of senior lawyers."

It appears that that type of organisation is not what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has in mind, which is a pity.

There are very good reasons why the investigative body should be made up of police officers, and specifically there is a need for such investigators to have police powers. However, the sheer number of investigations per year, which might increase to the present number of referrals—800—and the strain that that would place on police forces, must raise the possibility of including people other than existing members of police forces. When Operation Countryman was going on, I heard that it was impossible for some police forces to operate properly because so many police officers were seconded to take part in that inquiry.

We must be cognisant of the public scepticism about police investigating police. We did something to address that concern by establishing the independent Police Complaints Authority and the Crown Prosecution Service. However, it was aggravated by Operation Countryman's complete failure to bring anyone to justice, notwithstanding what was generally considered to be a thoroughly unsatisfactory situation. It was widely believed—I think with good reason—that nothing came of Operation Countryman because it was a case of police officers investigating police officers.

I made the point by way of intervention during my right hon. and learned Friend's speech that many excellent, young though retired and experienced police officers—some of them of senior rank and all of them very responsible—might well have their expertise employed usefully in investigations and inquiries. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will examine whether it is possible to improve the investigation procedures of the proposed commission.

I do not suggest for a moment that journalists are the best statement takers. Judging from the quotations that I have allegedly given to journalists in recent years, I consider them to be the worst statement takers. Comedians could take statements as well as journalists do, but I do not think that anyone is suggesting that investigations should be in the hands of comedians.

I have already alluded to a problem with the procedures of the new appellate body which is not like the Court of Appeal. New evidence may be discovered which is not admissible in law and therefore, under the existing rules, would surely have to be rejected by the Court of Appeal. Everyone may realise that a miscarriage of justice has taken place, but nothing can be done about it because the commission has discovered evidence which is inadmissible in the Court of Appeal to which the matter is referred.

We will be no further advanced in curing miscarriages of justice if that is the end of the road. How will we remedy that problem? I am afraid that there may be no alternative but to admit hearsay or any other kind of inadmissible evidence. In its evidence, the Society of Conservative Lawyers said:

"we do think that certain miscarriages of justice where the wrong person is convicted might be avoided if the defence could in some circumstances rely on 'hearsay' evidence."

We suggested:

"So-called 'self-serving' or 'exculpatory' statements should be admissible to show consistency";

obviously that was at the point of trial. We also suggested:

"The defence should be able to adduce 'hearsay' if it can satisfy the judge that direct evidence is not available in practice, that the evidence is relevant, that it comes from an apparently reliable source, and that justice requires its admission".

I think—the draft article by Professor Sir John Smith suggests this also—that we should grasp the nettle.

The object of this exercise is to abolish miscarriages of justice as far as we can—I add that qualification because we can never exclude the possibility that people will deliberately lie in circumstances when those lies cannot be detected, or that eye witnesses may make honest mistakes but no evidence exists to the contrary. If we are to deal effectively with miscarriages of justice, we must consider the need for some far-reaching changes in the rules of evidence.

It is not enough to state in the Bill that the test is whether or not the verdict is "unsafe" and expect the courts to interpret it anew. We would spend all of our time in the Court of Appeal arguing what "unsafe" meant. It is not enough simply to set up a commission without considering what kind of evidence it might discover which would then come up against the buffers of existing rules of law and practice in our courts.

Mr. Stephen: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am nearing the end of my speech; however, I will give way.

Mr. Stephen: My hon. and learned Friend suggests that hearsay evidence might be admissible in certain circumstances to avoid miscarriages of justice, to the

detriment of the defendant. Does he accept that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) suggested, the admission of hearsay evidence might result in miscarriages of justice, to the detriment of the public?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: That has always been an argument against admitting hearsay evidence. However, we are talking about a conviction as a result of evidence which may be suspect, although the reason for thinking that it is suspect may not be admissible. We are not talking about those miscarriages that acquit the guilty; the Government have toughened the laws of criminal trial to ensure that miscarriages of justice involving the acquittal of guilty persons do not take place. Today, we are discussing miscarriages of justice where we convict the innocent. It is in that context that the question of hearsay evidence which helps the appellant may need to be raised and considered.

Mr. Donald Anderson *rose—*

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Those were actually my very last words.

6.6 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Like previous speakers in the debate, I welcome the establishment of the criminal cases review commission, and I shall refer to those parts of the Bill which deal with it.

The Home Secretary did not convince me with his defence of why the commission was such a long time coming. I might have been more receptive to his explanations before the enactment of last year's criminal justice legislation—which included provisions such as removal of the right of silence—which will probably lead to more miscarriages of justice.

However, we all welcome the establishment of the commission, and we must ensure that it works as well as it possibly can. The concerns that have been expressed on both sides of the House go to the detail of how the commission will work. It is absolutely critical that the legal profession and the public are confident about the commission's workings from the beginning. Such confidence is vital if the commission is to work well and to be respected.

I shall refer to two areas relating to confidence. The first is the composition of the commission. Clearly, we will not debate whom the commission should comprise today or in Committee. However, it is important to examine how its members will be appointed, and I welcome the Home Secretary's advice that the positions shall be advertised. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said, the commission's membership is important, because that will determine the way in which the commission is perceived initially.

Some members of the commission should have a legal background, but I hope that there will be a wide interpretation of the description of commission members in clause 8. Paragraph (6) states that they shall be

"persons who appear to . . . have knowledge or experience of any aspect of the criminal justice system . . . "

I was pleased that the Home Office discussion paper stated:

"The most important qualifications for the work which the Authority will undertake are likely to be an ability to assess and interpret facts and behaviour; patience and sensitivity; an open-minded determination to get to the root of what are often complex and enigmatic problems. As several commentators have noted, a fresh perspective is likely to be especially valuable in reviewing cases which the ordinary processes of law have failed to resolve satisfactorily."

It was thought that that might be provided by appointing non-legal members with experience of the criminal justice system and others who could bring a range of appropriate skills and experience from other backgrounds. The Home Office clearly had in view a wide range of people, and I trust that that will be reflected in the appointments.

The commission should reflect to some degree its potential client group, and should bear in mind strong evidence of the disproportionate effects of the criminal justice system on people from ethnic minority backgrounds. We know from some evidence given to the royal commission that the workings of the system contribute to the experiences of black and other ethnic minority defendants in respect of admissions, pleas of guilt, court of trial, whether or not bail is granted, and sentencing. The commission will also be able to consider sentencing.

The 1992 study by Dr. Roger Hood of the sentencing of black defendants was commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality, and its chair introduced that report with the observation that, if sentencing by the courts had been within the scope of the Race Relations Act 1976, the discrimination uncovered by Dr. Hood's rigorous statistical analysis would nave been unlawful. That seems to indicate some problems, and implies that, if the commission is to deal with sentencing also, it will have some work to do.

When Home Office Ministers make appointments to the commission, I trust that they will remember those Home Office reports, and that it is made clear from the start that people from a wide variety of backgrounds are encouraged to apply.

The independence of the commission's investigations was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), and the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) expressed reservations about the processes for which the Bill provides. Part of the commission's work will be uncovering police malpractice. That is not to suggest, as other speakers have made clear, that all policemen are corrupt. However, we know from earlier cases of miscarriages of justice that police malpractice was involved. It is wrong in principle to use in the work of uncovering such malpractices currently serving police officers.

There is a real and dangerous lack of public confidence in police internal investigations. It is clear that the Police Complaints Authority is not regarded with any great confidence outside the House. In 1993, of nearly 18,000 complaints to the PCA, only 227 led to disciplinary charges. In more than 90 per cent. of cases, no disciplinary action was taken. One can only conclude that there is something wrong with the system, or that there are an awful lot of congenital liars about the place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn pointed out that the consequence is less use being made of the PCA and more use of civil actions against the police. I do not want that lack of confidence replicated with the commission.

I am not convinced that the skills and expertise needed to investigate an alleged miscarriage of justice are necessarily the same as those required in day-to-day

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

police work. I am not convinced either that the proposed powers of supervision and direction are the same as direct control over an investigation.

Linked to public confidence is accessibility—the barriers to a case being considered. The Government are concerned about the commission being swamped with thousands of spurious cases, which would prevent the new body from doing its work. We obviously do not want the commission's time wasted, but we must consider not just highly publicised, high-profile cases—significant though they may be. Many of the people who approach hon. Members alleging that they are victims of miscarriages of justice are not well known, and do not have easy access to support and advocacy. They may have difficulty with reading or writing, and in presenting their cases effectively. They may be people of limited means.

The provision to self-refer to the commission will be important, but so will be the way in which an initial approach is assessed. Applicants should not easily be rejected because of the sometimes inadequate nature of their initial approach. Accessibility applies also to referral to the Court of Appeal, to which I will refer later.

As Members of Parliament, we are approached by members of the public who protest their innocence. In some cases, they do not present much in the way of new evidence. In others, one may feel that the contrary evidence is more credible. In any event, we do not have the ability to undertake in-depth investigation. In my experience, the greatest difficulties arise where a jury's decision is involved, and it is not easy to identify a new avenue of inquiry, even though one may have serious doubts about the safety of a conviction.

I have spent most time on a case involving a young African woman convicted of drug smuggling, sentenced to seven years in prison and then deported. I was convinced of her innocence but, given the circumstances, it was extremely difficult to pursue that case through the present system. There should be no difficult hurdles in the way of access to the commission when it is investigating such cases.

The same applies to referrals back to the Court of Appeal. Under the Bill, referrals after a conviction must be based on an argument or evidence not already raised which gives rise to a real possibility that the conviction would not be upheld. The question then is: how far is the commission being asked to make judgments about whether a conviction would be upheld? Would not a more realistic test be whether the evidence was not incredible and was relevant?

Surely the court is the place to decide whether a conviction should be upheld. I know that these judgments have to be made, but we often hear complaints about the Crown Prosecution Service to the effect that it has made a wrong judgment about the possibility of obtaining a conviction. The hurdles placed before the commission when it comes to scrutinise miscarriages of justice should be made as low as possible.

I should like to ask the Minister for clarification of three clauses. First, I am worried about the impact of clauses 16 and 17, the second of which refers to old cases. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked the Minister about the range of cases that the commission might be able to look at.

Clause 17 relates to access to documents, while clause 16 states that the commission may have access to documents from public bodies, if a

"person serving in a public body has possession or control of a document or other material which may assist the Commission".

But clause 17 makes it clear that that does not apply to material in a Government Department if the document or material

"is relevant to a case which the Secretary of State has at any time considered with a view to deciding whether to make a reference under section 17 of the 1968 Act".

That would seem to have serious implications for cases such as that of the Bridgewater Three, which involved the Secretary of State considering whether to make a reference under section 17.

To be sure, the Secretary of State will give the commission documents containing representations made to him—but one assumes that they would be easy to get hold of anyway; so may we have clarification of what sort of documents will be withheld? It would seem that internal C3 documents will not be accessible to the commission. That fact alone needs justifying, because some old cases will be affected if such documents are withheld.

Clause 5 also needs clarifying. It allows the Court of Appeal to direct the commission to investigate, a power that I would expect to be used only in limited circumstances. The Home Office discussion paper raised a number of questions about how the power might be used, and about the relationship between the court and the commission when the power is used.

Will the court ask the commission to provide assistance and leave the commission with discretion as to the depth of the ensuing inquiry? Will the commission be able to pursue inquiries that may seem relevant to the case, apart from the inquiry that is asked for by the court?

Furthermore, what will be the position of an appellant in the Court of Appeal? If he is asked to comment or to give evidence to the commission while he is still in the middle of his case at the Court of Appeal, one would not expect him to have to incriminate himself. What, therefore, will be the relationship between the court and the commission?

What will happen if, after the appeal is over, the person who has been convicted wants to make further representations to the commission? Will the original reference by the Court of Appeal to the commission have an impact on that?

We all welcome the setting up of the commission: it is long overdue. Certain matters of detail, however, need to be put right, as we all want the commission to work well. We want it to reduce the number of miscarriages of justice, and to allow old cases to be effectively looked at again. Just because a case is already being investigated should not constitute a barrier to presenting it to the commission in the future.

6.26 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I welcome this Bill and support its Second Reading. I know that my constituents, a number of whom have written to me in recent years about miscarriages of justice, will be pleased that legislation has been quickly introduced—a fact on which I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

As the House knows, I am parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales, whose views I have naturally sought. They are a matter of legitimate interest in consideration of this important piece of legislation.

The federation, together with the Police Superintendents Association and the Association of Chief Police Officers, submitted an agreed memorandum of evidence on this subject to the Royal Commission on criminal justice. This is an example of the three police staff associations acting together to comment on a subject of enormous importance to the country and the police service.

The view of the Police Federation is that many of the recent well-known appeals have been successful after long, prominent campaigns on behalf of those convicted. The federation believes that it is difficult for a senior Cabinet Minister such as the Home Secretary to maintain a detached judgment which is focused only on evidential issues; and it is perhaps unfair to him—or one day, her—that he should be involved in the appeal process when, at all other stages, the judiciary is wholly independent of the Executive.

It is therefore a welcome step that the Bill provides that the referral of cases to the Court of Appeal in circumstances when the Home Secretary at present makes the decision should in future be undertaken by a quasi-judicial forum comprising lawyers and lay persons.

In its evidence to the royal commission, the federation said that it was difficult to see what body other than the police could carry out the necessary inquiries into possible miscarriages of justice. The management and co-ordination of a major inquiry is obviously a complex and specialist function. Detailed understanding of the initial investigation would always be required.

It seems to the federation that such expertise lies only in the police service, and that it would be unrealistic and unfair on the appellant and the prosecution to ask any other body to re-investigate a case without that expertise. It should be recognised also that, in all the cases that have given rise to the present concern, the discrepancies have been discovered and exposed in the end by meticulous police inquiries.

As far as I am aware, there has never been a suggestion that the further inquiries normally undertaken by an outside police force have been less than rigorous, or that any evidence which benefits the defendant has been suppressed. It is for those reasons that the federation supports the main objectives set out in the Bill.

The police are aware that the proposals in the Bill have aroused some criticism because of the decision to leave the investigation of cases in their hands. This criticism, where it exists, can be answered by drawing attention to the long experience of the system by which police investigations into serious complaints against the service are carried out under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority.

The federation is not aware of any case in which it has been suggested, still less established, that such investigations have not been fair and thorough. There is therefore no reason to suspect that that will not be the position with investigations by the criminal cases review commission.

I agree with the views that have been expressed to me by the police. They say that, taking into account the fact that the criminal justice system has undergone major reforms in recent years, almost all the cases that have caused public concern pre-date current legislation. That point has been made by several hon. Members.

The federation believes that the creation of the proposed commission will inevitably lead to a substantial rise in the number of cases in which miscarriages of justice are alleged. It considers, however, that it is not unreasonable to expect that the number of cases that will be found to merit reference to the courts will not be significantly greater than it is now.

Consequently, the federation believes that it is sensible to rely on police investigations. It does not, however, rule out the possibility that the new commission might itself decide, in the light of experience, that it should have its own investigative arm, consisting perhaps of former police officers and others with appropriate experience and qualifications. That point was made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence).

I can tell my hon. Friend the Minister of State that there is some concern in police circles that the cost and manpower implications for the service might have been understated. It is estimated that, at least initially, the number of cases in which a miscarriage of justice is alleged might double to about 1,500 annually. There will therefore be more references to the courts than the current average of 10 or 12 cases a year. Given increases in the case load of those proportions, there is concern that, when the Bill is enacted, it should not place extra demands on precious police resources.

The federation has told me that it believes that consideration should be given to reimbursing police forces for the cost of investigations that are carried out at the behest of the commission. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is listening carefully to the debate, will take that request fully into account.

It is a welcome development in considering the Bill that the House knows that its provisions have the support of the Police Complaints Authority. There has been some discussion about the PCA this afternoon, so it is important to place on record the fact that it supports the Bill. The PCA called for the setting up of an independent body to investigate possible miscarriages of justice in its evidence to the Royal Commission on criminal justice. It therefore looks forward to the proposed commission, and to co-operating with it in future.

The House knows that the PCA has considerable experience of supervising investigations into alleged miscarriages of justice. These arise in three ways. The first and largest group results from complaints against police officers by convicted persons. Secondly, when the Home Office requests a police review or reinvestigation of a case involving possible police misconduct, the investigating force may well seek the added safeguard of supervision by the PCA. Thirdly, evidence which raises doubt about the safety of a conviction may be turned up in the course of an unrelated complaint investigation. I understand that it is always acted upon, even if the person concerned has not claimed to be the victim of a miscarriage.

[Mr. Michael Shersby]

A survey in July 1992 showed that the PCA was supervising 26 cases involving possible miscarriages of justice, involving 30 individuals and 15 police forces. A similar assessment in January of this year revealed 17 such cases, involving officers in 11 different police forces.

The PCA was not involved in cases such as those of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, or that of Carl Bridgewater, which predated its establishment in 1985. However, the authority supervised investigations which formed the basis of successful appeals by Sam Kulasingham and Prem Sivalingham, who were convicted of murdering Tamils in east London; of Edward Browning, who was convicted of murdering Mrs. Marie Wilkes on the M50; and of the Darvell brothers, whom we have already heard about. Other important cases include the West Midlands serious crime squad, where 97 cases were referred to the Home Office and where, following a supervised inquiry, 22 officers had their sentences quashed by the Court of Appeal.

Another case that is worth recalling is that of ex-Police Constable Corley, who was accused of involvement in armed robberies and sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment. A supervised investigation resulted in a successful appeal. The investigation subsequently revealed, however, that he had been the victim of a conspiracy.

There is a case for openness in dealing with these difficult matters. For that reason, the PCA welcomes the fact that the proposed commission will enjoy more freedom to explain its decisions than is currently permitted under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

The PCA also takes the view that the police are best equipped to investigate cases. That is an important conclusion. The chairman of the New Zealand complaints authority recently said:

"Experience has shown throughout the world that civilians cannot investigate police as well as police can. It is much easier to deceive the public than it is other police."

I must agree with that view.

Home Office statistics show that the overwhelming majority of cases to be considered by the new commission do not involve accusations against police officers. I understand that it is likely that there will be only a limited number—perhaps 15 or 20—a year.

I wish the Bill well, and hope that it will have a speedy passage through Parliament. It is a major step forward, which will be welcomed by the public in general. It will help to restore confidence, which has been dented by some wrongful convictions in the recent past.

6.38 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Like many of my colleagues, I welcome the proposal to set up the criminal cases review commission. Many would say that it has taken about 25 years to take this step, and that it should have been done sooner. I should explain at this stage that I have a sore throat. I ask the House to bear with me.

The proposal to set up the commission is vital to the area that I represent in part, because the west midlands has had problems with a minority of the West Midlands police over some years. I shall not rehearse individual cases this evening, because some of my colleagues have already touched on them. The House knows that we have experienced the problem of the Birmingham Six and other serious cases. An independent review commission could also investigate faulty forensic tests. I am sure that some hon. Members know exactly what I mean by that.

There is also the question of police evidence. If it is established properly, the commission will be able to go a long way towards restoring public confidence in the police. In some instances, the majority of policemen have been branded by cases that obscure the fact that only a minority have engaged in certain practices. I entirely accept what some of my hon. Friends have already pointed out: most policemen are offended when a colleague is found guilty of impropriety.

As all hon. Members who represent inner cities know, such areas rely heavily on the police, and it is therefore vital to restore confidence in them. I am slightly disappointed in only one aspect of the Bill. While I am aware that this is not part of the remit that we are discussing, I feel that much more could have been done to help the police, and to ensure that they do not make mistakes, through the provision of witness protection schemes. I am referring to genuine mistakes: if witnesses are frightened, they do not always provide accurate information.

I should like to know about the composition of the new commission. I hope that the Home Secretary will find places for representatives of ethnic minorities. Most of us know that, rightly or wrongly, many members of those minorities feel that they are discriminated against in the courts and that injustices are often perpetrated. If the Home Secretary examined that problem, the commission would be given some credibility.

In 1982, the Select Committee on Home Affairs recommended that the police should be investigated by a body other than themselves. A number of organisations have been suggested. I am not too concerned which organisation should perform the task, but I should like to know why the police should do it. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) that the police are probably better at investigating themselves than anyone else is at investigating them, but I should like that argument to be tested: it is often used in the House without much justification.

I should also like to know more about the composition of the proposed commission. I understand that solicitors will form a third of it, but what about the other two thirds? The Home Secretary referred to "adequate resources"; what does he mean by that? Is it pounds, shillings and pence, or is it bodies? If he is referring to staff who will be playing an investigatory role, we need to know how much money will be spent. If the commission is not adequately resourced, it will not fulfil the functions we wish it to fulfil: it will not be able to right wrongs perpetrated in the administration of justice.

The Home Secretary pointed out that police training had improved over the years, and said that he was in the forefront in the fight against crime. I do not know about that. As other hon. Members have pointed out, many police budgets may be cut in future, while some have already been cut. If the police are to do their job adequately and not make mistakes, they must be given adequate resources; but too much lip service has been paid to that principle.

As I have said many times in the House, the whole question of standard spending assessments must be examined. It is easy to obscure the resources granted to the police by citing a general local authority budget, and it is possible to advance 57 arguments for each case, without spelling out the resources that are actually available.

Lady Olga Maitland: Am I to understand that the hon. Gentleman is not satisfied with the Government's proposal for a staff of about 60 in the new commission? Is he suggesting a staff twice that size? Will he bear in mind what that would cost?

Mr. Cunningham: I do not think that it is for me to say how much it would cost. I want to know how much the Government will put into the new scheme, and what they mean by "adequate resources". I think that that means a bit more than money. The hon. Lady should direct her question to Ministers.

The Government say that they are at the forefront of the fight against crime, but they have cut resources for police authorities; they have also cut legal aid. If we are genuinely to debate justice, we must deal with those facts. Funds for victim support schemes and the safer cities programme have also been cut. Many people living in deprived areas feel aggrieved when they find themselves in a court of law without adequate resources to put their case, and that is another reason for establishing the new commission.

Mr. Shersby: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the country is currently spending £432 million on legal aid? That huge sum, which is dispensed by justices' clerks and through the medium of solicitors, must be seen in the context of the criminal justice system as a whole. As for the cuts to which the hon. Gentleman refers, I am sure that he is referring to ability to claim on the basis of income rather than the total cost of the scheme.

Mr. Cunningham: My point is that the poorer members of society experience difficulties in obtaining legal aid. I am not talking about multi-millionaires. As with any other resources, we must ask what basis should be used for the provision of resources for legal aid. The judgment should surely be made on the basis of need. Hon. Members tend to judge less on the basis of need than on the basis of how much can be returned to the taxpayer, but I do not think that justice should be based on that principle.

Although I broadly welcome the Bill, I hope that the Home Secretary will consider some of what I have said.

6.48 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I begin by making some apologies. I must apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as a representative of Madam Speaker; I must also apologise to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, to other Ministers and to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) for having been unavoidably absent until fairly late in the debate. I was undertaking other parliamentary duties. I gather from those to whom I have spoken that the opening speeches were of a high quality, and it is my loss rather than that of other hon. Members that I was not present to hear them.

I also apologise to Back Benchers on both sides of the House whose speeches I was not able to hear. I am glad, however, that I have been able to hear some interesting contributions in the past hour and a half or so. I am happy that, with one or two exceptions on different matters, the Bill is receiving all-party support. It seems to fit into the scheme of things in criminal justice, and it will allow a more humane and, if I may say so, effective system of dealing with complaints about the criminal justice system.

As I understand it, there are three main objectives to the reforms proposed by the Bill: first, to ensure that convictions that cannot be considered safe are quashed, leaving those that are safe to stand; secondly, to provide arrangements to ensure that doubts about the safety of a conviction can be considered and resolved at the earliest opportunity; and thirdly, to ensure a consistency of approach in criminal proceedings, so that the final decision on whether a conviction should stand is in all cases taken by the courts, whether on an ordinary appeal or following a re-examination of the case by another body. Those are perfectly unobjectionable aims, and I trust that, when the Bill becomes an Act, they will be realised.

It might be of some assistance to the House to place the Bill in an historical context. I do so with some diffidence, because I am not much of a criminal historian, and certainly not much of a criminal lawyer. I must declare an interest, in that I am a member of the Bar and earn my living at the Bar when I am not here.

I have not done a criminal case since about 1978, and all sorts of magical things have happened since then about which I am wholly ignorant, but I do know that, before 1907, there was no general right of appeal against conviction or sentence; there was simply no Court of Appeal. Miscarriages of justice could be corrected only by using the royal prerogative of mercy, on the advice of a Secretary of State. There has always been—I am not sure that it has been a happy thing—a political intervention in the criminal justice system in the recommendation for the use of the royal prerogative of mercy. As I understand it, the Bill makes proposals with regard to the royal prerogative, and has some effect on it.

The Criminal Appeal Act 1907 set up the Court of Criminal Appeal, which was given by the House and Parliament as a whole the power to correct wrongful convictions on appeal, and the Secretary of State had the power to refer cases to it. The right to request a referral lay solely with the defendant. That remained the position until shortly after the second world war, when the House passed the Criminal Justice Act 1948, which allowed a referral to be made as a result of representations from any other person. Following that Act, we have a "multi-accessed approach"—if I may use a disgusting expression—to the Court of Criminal Appeal.

The Administration of Justice Act 1960 gave the Secretary of State discretion to refer a case. The Criminal Appeal Act 1966 set up the criminal division of the Court of Appeal, replacing the Court of Criminal Appeal. The Criminal Appeal Act 1968 gave the Secretary of State power to refer cases to the Court of Appeal.

In July 1993, the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice was established, which, as the House will know, is widely known as the Runciman commission. It has recently reported, and many of its recommendations have been considered in the Home Affairs Select Committee, of which until January I was honoured to be a member.

I see that my former colleague, the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien), who sits on the Opposition Benches, is in his place. He was removed from that Committee to sit on the Treasury Select Committee.

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

Whether he finds it as enjoyable as we used to find the Home Affairs Select Committee, I have no idea, but I can see that he is itching to tell us. No doubt in due course he will intervene to tell us about his work on that Committee.

As a result of the Runciman commission, a recommendation was made that the Secretary of State's power to refer cases to the Court of Appeal should be removed and given to a new, independent review body. The Government accepted that recommendation. Also recommended were changes to the powers and functions of the Court of Appeal.

In March and June of 1994, further discussion papers were published, dealing with miscarriages of justice and changes in Northern Ireland, and the Bill was published in February 1995. So we have had nearly 90 years of legislative development, and the Bill is but the latest development—I can say with some confidence that it will be the last for some time—in the law as it relates to criminal justice.

The House will be aware from recent newspaper reports that Lord Justice Rose, sitting, I think, in the criminal division of the Court of Appeal, deprecated the number of Bills that have emerged from Parliament in the past 10 years or so dealing with criminal justice and which have become Acts. I sat on the Standing Committee that considered the Criminal Justice Bill 1993, a Bill that was designed to correct the mistakes that had been made in the Criminal Justice Act 1991. I believe that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), who is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, led for the Opposition in that Committee.

Although I was not a Member of the House at the time, I recall hearing the thoughts of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) during the passage of the Criminal Justice Bill 1991. He anticipated the Criminal Justice Bill 1993, and warned other hon. Members about the unitary fine system and about doing away with previous convictions points, which later had to be corrected in the 1993 Act.

I hope that will get this Bill right, and get it right at first blush, because there has been much pre-legislative discussion about it. I trust that the Government have taken on board the points that were drawn to their attention after reading the commission's report, and through listening to the deliberations of experts such as my hon. and learned Friend and other interested parties outside Parliament—academics, legal practitioners and so forth—who have taken an interest in the matter.

If I may say so, the conduct of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) cannot be brushed aside as an inconvenient intervention of a Labour Member of Parliament. Although I do not agree with him on all sorts of issues, his work on a number of alleged cases of criminal injustice is commendable and has got us all thinking.

The hon. Gentleman cannot, of course, claim all the credit for some of the corrections to injustices that have taken place. Indeed, my predecessor, Sir John Farr, who represented the constituency of Harborough from 1959 until the previous general election, was instrumental in adding Conservative teeth to the point that was raised by the hon. Gentleman. I, as Sir John did before, had the honour of representing a number of what I might call "involuntary constituents"—those who are incarcerated in Gartree prison.

It was while visiting Gartree that Sir John met a number of the Birmingham Six, and he was of great assistance to them in helping them to get their convictions overturned. For present purposes, it does not matter whether those convictions were wrong or right. What matters, for present purposes, is that it took all the work of a Member of Parliament, who lent them his photocopying machine at home to photocopy papers and so forth; the work of the press and of other Members of Parliament, including the hon. Member for Sunderland, South, to get those convictions overturned.

I have represented—I am not sure whether it still applies—some of the Bridgwater Three. I did a little work on their behalf to see that their case was drawn to the attention of the Home Office.

I am currently engaged in another case involving an involuntary constituent who has been convicted of murder. I have read the judge's summing up at the trial and the Court of Appeal judgments, and, in my view, there is a lurking doubt about the safety of the conviction in that case. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) is currently looking at the case, and I shall not embarrass him or interfere in his departmental discussions by mentioning the name of the case.

The lesson to be drawn from all those activities is that it seems to take a long time for anything to be done. I hope that the Bill will provide a system for much quicker resolution of complaints.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Despite all that my hon. Friend has said, with which I agree, does he share my concern that the one problem arising from the Bill, which I welcome, is the danger of great pressure from single-issue lobby groups to try to get media pressure for a cause celebre just for the sake of it? Does he agree that there is a danger that such pressure might weigh too heavily on a body such as that which is proposed?

Mr. Garnier: As the body has yet to be set up, I have no idea whether it will be susceptible to that sort of pressure. I intervened during the debate on the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill on Friday to complain about legislation by postcard, and I trust that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will be resolute in not allowing any new body to be open to such pressure.

The converse argument is that this is a democracy, and if a matter worries people, then who the hell do they write to if not their Member of Parliament or the body that deals with the matter? While I acknowledge the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), I do not think that they should be paramount in our discussions.

I shall now deal with the speed at which complaints are dealt with. Figures produced by the Home Office on the number of representations about wrongful convictions and actions taken show that there were 536 in 1988, and that they resulted in two referrals to the Court of Appeal, one of which was dropped before it reached there. In 1989, there were 568 cases, and six were referred. In 1990, 731 were considered, and 20 were referred. It is interesting that, in 1989 and 1990, all the appeals were allowed.

Therefore, it appears that the Minister who considered those cases got it right, by referring only those that should not have resulted in conviction in the first place.

In 1991, 714 cases were considered, 12 were referred to the Court of Appeal and all were allowed. In 1992, 763 were considered, and 11 were referred to the Court of Appeal. I understand that one is outstanding at the moment. Eight appeals were allowed. In 1993, 670 cases were considered and nine were referred. One of those has been abandoned and four are outstanding. So far, three appeals have been allowed, and one has been dismissed. In 1994, 480 cases were considered, and 12 were referred. We do not yet know how many of those appeals will be allowed or dismissed.

We are debating large numbers of cases, but they are not huge in relation to the number that magistrates courts and Crown courts have to deal with. None the less, the number of cases is not small, and I trust that they will be dealt with expeditiously by the new body.

The proposed changes to the criminal appeals system have been set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, and I shall not bore the House by repeating them. However, I ask him to consider the financial consequences of the Bill. I refer especially to the explanatory and financial memorandum in the Bill, and the heading "Financial effects of the Bill" in part IV. I shall not bore the House by reading out what is stated there, because hon. Members can read it for themselves.

One of the financial effects about which the Bill is silent is the issue of legal aid. I think that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) mentioned that. What are the Bill's implications for legal aid? When an aggrieved prisoner contacts his solicitor and asks him to refer his case or to get something done about it, the solicitor may act more willingly if he is remunerated. Obviously, some solicitors act, as they say, pro bono publico, and single-issue campaign lawyers have been mentioned. Plenty of good solicitors require to be paid, and why not? Will they be given legal aid for dealing with referrals to the independent criminal cases review commission?

If the review commission takes on a case and reaches a whimsical or other conclusion which may be susceptible to judicial review, will the complainant, the aggrieved prisoner, or any other interested person, be allowed legal aid for representation in the divisional court which will review the decision of the commission?

I can ask those questions in a spirit of disinterest, since I do not carry out any legal aid work and have nothing whatever to gain from the answers. Perhaps legal aid solicitors will not have anything to gain from them either, because the Minister may say that legal aid is not available. None the less, as the Bill is silent on that matter, I should be grateful if the Minister of State could deal with it, either in writing in due course or, if he has a chance to consult his officials, in his winding-up speech.

A number of other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate, so I shall content myself by welcoming the Bill's broad overall aims. I trust that, as appears likely from the debate so far, it will have a reasonably uncontroversial passage, and that its Committee stage will be short. The sooner the commission is set up and in action, the better.

7.7 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Like other hon. Members who have spoken, I welcome the Bill. Naturally, as I represent a Northern Ireland constituency, the first welcome aspect of the Bill is that it covers Northern Ireland and is, therefore, what occurs only too rarely—legislation that covers Northern Ireland properly. The fact that provisions relating to Northern Ireland can be included in the Bill with so little difficulty gives the lie to those who say that there is a particular difficulty in legislating for Northern Ireland in the normal way.

One of the other excuses with which we are presented for not legislating for Northern Ireland through a proper Bill is the so-called need to maintain what is laughingly referred to as the integrity of the Northern Ireland statute book. I am glad that the Minister has the grace to smile at that reference.

I note that the Bill will amend five Northern Ireland Orders in Council. We have been told in the past that that cannot be done because it would somehow affect the integrity of the Northern Ireland statute book. I am delighted that we are legislating for Northern Ireland properly.

I also welcome the Bill because of its central provision—the establishment of a criminal cases review commission. I am glad that that single commission will be established to cover England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Office published a consultation paper suggesting that separate provision be made for Northern Ireland. That proposal did not commend itself to me and my colleagues for a number of reasons. Northern Ireland is a small jurisdiction with only a limited number of people involved in the legal profession. There are only 10 High Court judges. Only a limited number of people are involved in criminal work, whether at the Bar or as solicitors.

In any small profession, everybody knows everybody else. That makes it difficult for people to be genuinely objective when they are asked to consider the possibility that their friends or colleagues have made a mistake. They also tend to have convinced themselves that they are running a good ship and that they are all fine chaps—unlike those terrible people across the border in England where, because there are so many of them, rogues might get into the profession and all sorts of mistakes be made. A little esprit is built up among the members of a small profession, which is not especially healthy.

Some of that attitude exists also in the one jurisdiction in the United Kingdom that is not affected by the Bill, which is Scotland. My connection with the Scottish legal profession is limited. The Minister has extensive connections with it and I think that he will confirm that it suffers from the same failing of being fond of congratulating itself, but not so good at looking objectively at itself.

I am glad that there is the possibility of outsiders looking into the profession objectively. That raises the possibility of people involved in the legal profession in Northern Ireland contributing to the work of the commission in England and Wales. They will be able to contribute an element of objectivity.

Another reason why we were not enthusiastic about separate provision for Northern Ireland is that anything to do with the Northern Ireland Office is becoming

[Mr. David Trimble]

increasingly tainted by sectarianism. Indeed, when the Northern Ireland Office sets up any body, the first thing that comes into its mind is the political and religious affiliation of the person involved. If there were to be a separate, single commissioner for Northern Ireland, as the Northern Ireland Office suggested, we know that the very first consideration in the minds of Ministers making the appointment would be political and religious affiliation. The same would be the case were there to be a separate Northern Ireland commission.

In that undue sectarianism that the Northern Ireland Office is injecting into every part of political and social life in Northern Ireland, there is the evil influence of the Anglo-Irish secretariat. I hope that, when appointments to the commission are made, the Home Office, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office will be careful to ensure that the advice that they receive from the Northern Ireland Office is not tainted—as almost inevitably it will be—by the machinations of the secretariat, whose influence extends into almost all aspects of the work of the Northern Ireland Office.

I note that the Bill contains a provision to appoint to the commission persons with experience of the legal system in Northern Ireland. The relevant clause includes Northern Ireland legal qualifications among the criteria for those to be appointed to the commission. However, I have not seen any reference, or heard any statement by Ministers, on whether they intend to appoint one, two or any people with knowledge of the legal system in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will deal with that point when he replies. We need some indication of the extent to which people with experience of the legal system in Northern Ireland will be involved in the work of the commission.

I want to deal now with some of the substantive provisions in the Bill. Clause 2 provides for the new test that the Court of Appeal will use in determining whether to quash convictions. A number of hon. Members have already referred to that. I agree with the point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) when he referred to the word "unsafe". I hope that that word will be given a wide interpretation and that the court will take the view that a conviction is unsafe if it "may be" unsafe. I hope that the exclusion of the words "may be" from the clause will not narrow the interpretation. That is an important point. The Minister will have noted the concern expressed by Justice that it will have the effect of narrowing the provision.

I was impressed by the points made by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) when he gave his exegesis of clause 2. I want to hear more of his thoughts. He made an interesting contribution. Indeed, he whetted my appetite when he referred to the article by Sir John Smith. I hope that we will be able closely to consider such matters in Committee. Having said that, I support the broad thrust of clause 2, which replaces the various different overlapping terms in earlier legislation with a single test—provided that that single test is expressed broadly enough to, if anything, widen the jurisdiction of the Court of Appeal.

Clause 13 sets out various criteria on which the commission can refer cases to the Court of Appeal. I understand and agree with the thinking behind the phrase "a real possibility", in the commission's view, that the court will reopen a conviction. However, I am not as happy with the qualification that the evidence or argument on which that real possibility must be based must be one that has not already been raised. It is unnecessary to limit it in that way.

I understand the thinking behind it; it is a thinking that pervades so much of the criminal justice system. Rather than looking at the merits of a particular case, we look at the procedures and the way in which things have been done. A former colleague of mine characterised it as the criminal trial as a game. We look to see whether the lawyers and other persons acting for a defendant did the right thing at an earlier stage: for example, if they had the opportunity to raise a point, but failed to do so, the point could not be raised subsequently.

Clause 13 provides that, if the point, the evidence or the argument has been raised in the court or on appeal, the commission cannot use it as a basis on which to refer the case. That is unnecessarily restrictive. The point may have been raised, but not adequately; or it may have been raised in connection with some other points and the cumulative effect of the commission looking at it again may result in its deciding that the case should be referred to the Court of Appeal.

I thought that the thinking behind the changes in clause 2 and in other parts of the Bill was to widen the basis on which the commission could operate and to remove unnecessary technicality from its approach.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that, if it is exactly the same evidence as was raised before, and which the Court of Appeal had had the opportunity to consider, and there was nothing new, different or revised about the evidence, the commission should again refer back to the Court of Appeal, perhaps hoping that there might be different judges? What would be the point of that?

Mr. Trimble: My point is that the commission should not be trammelled or restricted. It should be open to the commission to exercise its judgment without any technical limitation. The Minister rightly says that in the sort of cases that he mentioned we would not want to refer the matter back to the court. However, there may be circumstances in which a point has been raised before, but when the commission looks at it again it thinks, "Ah, this point should be considered again." Those cases may be exceptional, but the commission should be free to do that if such cases occur. The argument is to give the commission the flexibility and the power to act if it considers it desirable to do so.

One of the main points in the debate involves investigations and how they should be conducted. There has been quite a bit of disagreement on the Bill's provisions, which, in effect, require the commission to use existing police forces for investigations. I understand the concern that has been expressed and that there will be problem in relation to public credibility, but there is much merit in the Bill's provisions.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), who acts as adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales, said that only the police have the necessary expertise. That is valid, but there is more to the Bill's merits than that. It would not be desirable to create a special body of detectives who were employed by the commission so that it had its own police force to undertake investigations. That body would be an

anti-police police force, it would be viewed by police forces elsewhere as a special anti-police unit, and it would create a series of new institutional loyalties and jealousies and a defensiveness on the part of police forces elsewhere which would be inappropriate.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said that, after initial resistance, there had been a sea change in approach in the Court of Appeal in England. He is right on that. That change was welcome. A sea change has taken place in the approach of the House and of the Government to these issues—we should acknowledge that. We want a sea change in the culture and attitude of a number of detective forces. We want to open them up to new thinking. They will find it easier to do that if police forces are involved in investigations.

The point has been made that the police may not be especially effective in investigating the police, but we must consider what the commission will do in its approach to the matter. It can direct the inquiry. It needs to have available to it persons who are in a position to assess the quality of the investigation that a police force is undertaking. The commission may direct a particular police force to undertake an investigation; it can give some directions and so, in a sense, control that investigation. It needs, however, to have on its own staff persons who are in a position to assess the quality of that investigation so that, if it has not been conducted properly, they can take it away from certain police officers or a police force and place it elsewhere.

I notice that the Home Office consultation paper mentions in paragraph 83 the possibility of the commission employing among its staff persons with experience of police work and police investigations. This is perhaps the line that people should consider. On its staff, the commission should employ police officers with experience in these matters. They would not conduct investigations, but they would be able to advise the commission on the conduct of investigations that the commission has placed with police officers.

Mr. Maclean: I confirm that it is the Government's view that that is a sensible way to proceed. We want three or four serving police officers to work on the commission as directing staff, fulfilling the very role that the hon. Gentleman has described.

Mr. Trimble: I am delighted that the Minister has confirmed that that is the way in which the commission will operate. It is the best way to go. It provides flexibility. To proceed in that way will be a more efficient use of resources; it will be better than the commission employing its own police force. It reinforces my earlier point about the need for a broad and flexible approach on the matter. I am delighted by what the Minister said.

In our response to the consultation papers, we expressed concern about the Bill's provision that enables the commission to consider any case immediately after the 28-day period for appeal has passed. We suggested that the commission should, in deciding whether to investigate a case, have regard to the failure to appeal or to apply for an extension for time to appeal. Legal representatives of an accused person should not regard going to the commission as the easy way out; they should not do that instead of going to appeal. Hon. Members should be concerned about that and I hope that the commission will be concerned about it, too. I was pleased to note that Justice voiced the same concern in its suggestions on the matter.

Hon. Members have referred to the Police Complaints Authority and the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland. Neither the Bill's provisions nor Ministers' statements show what the relationship will be between the complaints bodies and the commission. It is obvious that an alleged miscarriage of justice could give rise to a complaint to the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland or to the Police Complaints Authority in England and Wales; it could also, however, lead to an application to the commission. What will then happen?

In the Home Office consultation paper, it was suggested that there might be informal arrangements between the two bodies to co-ordinate inquiries and to prevent overlap. I am not sure that that is sufficient. It may be necessary to consider further what the relationship will be between the complaint bodies and the commission. In considering the two, one should regard the commission as the superior body. If necessary, it should be able to have referred to it a case that is proceeding simultaneously through the two complaint bodies.

If I may stray a little into purely Northern Ireland considerations, I am not sure that it is desirable even to have a police complaints body if we have the commission and an independent police authority, which I hope will continue, part of whose function should be to examine whether the police are dealing adequately with cases. Far too many overlapping jurisdictions are being created. A little bit of rationalisation may be called for.

I referred earlier to Northern Ireland concerns and to the comment by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South that, a number of years ago, a sea change occurred in the attitude of the Court of Appeal in England and Wales. I regret that a similar sea change has not taken place in the attitude in Northern Ireland courts. In recent years, only one major case has been referred to the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal—what is known as the UDR Four case. I regret that, a couple of years ago, the judgment of the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal in that case showed the attitude of mind that had been present in the Court of Appeal in England before its sea change in attitude.

That attitude tends to represent any miscarriage of justice simply as a technicality. It says, "These men are really guilty, but we are having to let them out because there has been some error by the police officers." The Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland contrived the result by quashing the convictions of three of the people involved, but not a fourth—that of Neil Latimer. He is just as innocent as the other three, but he remains in prison simply because the Court of Appeal has not been able to face up to the fact that, as in the cases in England and Wales, the police had decided to "improve" the evidence.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South referred to the way in which the police sometimes appear to conduct sessions where they rewrite all their notes. Sometimes, senior police officers are involved in that. Lawyers acting for the UDR Four are convinced that exactly the same phenomenon occurred and that, at some point, the interviewing officer sat down and decided to rewrite the notes. Some of the rewriting was revealed by electrostatic document analysis—ESDA—testing and led to the convictions of three of the four being quashed. Unfortunately, justice has not been fully served.

[Mr. Trimble]

I understand that with regard to the latest application to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to have the case of Neil Latimer referred again to the Court of Appeal, the Secretary of State has said that he is minded that the doors have not yet closed and that he is prepared to consider any fresh information that may be relevant. I am glad that he has said that. However, I fear that this case would fall within the category mentioned by the Home Secretary in his speech. He said that there might be cases in which new evidence would, for some reason, be inadmissible and that that would be an appropriate situation for the use of the royal prerogative. I hope that that possibility will be looked at in this context, because it may be the only way in which we can solve a serious miscarriage of justice in Northern Ireland.

Interestingly, the UDR Four case is the only case in Northern Ireland so far in which there has been serious disquiet about conviction. That is somewhat ironic. The cases of miscarriage of justice in England and Wales have involved jury decisions. The Diplock courts in Northern Ireland, with a single judge, have been, with this solitary exception, free from mistake. I have often commented to people who criticise the Diplock single-judge courts that I find it strange that people concentrate so much on them, when, by and large, a reasonably good quality of justice is delivered, yet ignore the 98 per cent. of criminal cases in Northern Ireland which come before single-judge magistrates courts.

We have had single-judge courts in Northern Ireland since 1935. All magistrates courts are presided over by resident magistrates. In resident magistrates courts, we do not get the same quality of justice as we have had in the Diplock courts. My experience of magistrates courts is limited. I had a short, although distinguished, criminal record. Apart from that, my only other acquaintance with magistrates courts was appearing once as a witness in the context of the protests against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I remember that, when the police disclosed to us the police witness statements about the evidence that would be given in court, I and everyone else who read them fell about laughing because the police evidence was so laughable. However, I had reckoned without the magistrate concerned—no names, no pack drill. I am told by those who practise regularly in the magistrates courts that he has never been known to disbelieve the police. That is the quality of justice that occasionally occurs. For that reason, I am delighted that the Bill extends to summary cases—magistrates court cases—the power to have miscarriages of justice remedied through a referral back of the case. A clear gap in our legislative provision has now been remedied.

As I have said, we welcome the Bill and we shall support its principle. The opportunity may arise to look more closely at some of the points of detail that have been mentioned.

7.32 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): May I give a warm welcome to this extremely important Bill and say what a pleasure it is for me to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who is accompanied here in the Chamber by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux)? Not only do I have great respect for them both, but I welcome the fact that the Bill encompasses Northern Ireland. I welcome the fact that we are not going down the same old route of having to provide for separate legislation. The Bill is a good example of Ulster being seen as part of the United Kingdom—a position with which I feel totally happy and comfortable.

I do not accept the criticism that there has been undue delay with the Bill, which required careful thought and planning. It was not a matter of the Government at any time objecting to its principle; that was not so. There has always been deep and grave concern about miscarriages of justice. We have never been afraid of taking a good look at sacred cows. I would not like there to have been a knee-jerk reaction just to satisfy critics. That would have forced us to make decisions in haste which, on closer analysis, we might later have regretted because we had not paid sufficient detail to some aspects.

Our system of criminal justice results in relatively few convictions of the innocent, but one conviction of an innocent man or woman is one too many. By the same token, it means that somewhere out there, there are guilty men and women at large. We are keenly aware that, somewhere, the bombers of Guildford and Birmingham are still free. They have not been brought to justice, and we do not know whether they ever will be. I only hope and pray that they have something of a conscience which will burden them to end of their days, but I wonder.

I accept that there has been a debate over quite a time and I accept that, 14 years ago, the Select Committee on Home Affairs agreed that we should eventually take a course of action similar to that proposed in the Bill. I refer to a quotation from the Select Committee's 1982 report on miscarriages of justice. In recommending that a new review body should be established, the Committee said:

"Our main concern is that those cases which, following the initial sifting process, are thought by the Home Office to contain some substance, and in particular those involving a custodial sentence, should receive as thorough and expert a scrutiny as possible. We are convinced that there is a strong argument in favour of the introduction of an independent element at this stage, and that it is unreasonable that the Home Secretary should be expected to decide whether to grant a free pardon or to remit a sentence on the advice of his officials alone."

It was not only the Select Committee that raised those important points. The law reform group Justice made its own considerations. In a response to a Government reply to the Home Affairs Select Committee, it said:

"We accept that such a review body will not be infallible and will not satisfy everybody; we doubt whether this will ever be possible whatever system is devised. However, we believe that the present procedures are not capable of providing the requisite qualities of thoroughness, impartiality and independence that an inquiry into a serious complaint of miscarriage of justice requires. In his report into the investigation of the Preece case, the ombudsman stated:—

'A miscarriage of justice by which a man or woman loses his or her liberty is one of the gravest matters which can occupy the attention of a civilised society. And it seems to me that when an unprecedented pollution of justice at its source is discovered, quite an exceptional effort to identify and remedy its consequences is called for.'"

That is exactly what the Government are doing.

The detailed provisions for the establishment of a criminal cases review commission had to be carefully prepared and subject to wide consultation, hence the requirement for Lord Runciman to examine the proposition and to make considered representations in his report for the Royal Commission on criminal justice.

Submissions were sought and many bodies and people were interviewed. Further consultations have meant that the Bill goes further and goes into more detail than envisaged by Lord Runciman. The commission will, for example, be able to reverse summary cases dealt with by the magistrates court. A shoplifter will be able to have his case referred to the Court of Appeal or Crown court rather than seek a royal pardon, which is not satisfactory.

We must be wary of the pitfalls. On 26 October 1993, speaking in a debate in the other place on the royal commission report, Lord Windlesham warned that miscarriages of justice are

"easy to exploit for various purposes, including the pursuit of political capital."

Lord Ferrers, then Minister at the Home Office, reminded the House of the need to

"strike the right balance between, on the one hand, the public interest in the detection and punishment of crime, and, on the other hand, the individual interests both the of defendants and of the victims of crime."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 October 1993; Vol. 549, c.779-81.]

We all agree that we must ensure that our criminal justice system operates fairly if we are to maintain public confidence in it.

The system has worked to increase the chances of the guilty being convicted through the reform of the right to silence, the establishment of a DNA database and changes to identity parade procedures to stop them being abused. It is equally important, however, that only the guilty are convicted. The care with which Bill has been prepared will ensure a fair and efficient system to correct miscarriages of justice.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) was responsible, as he said earlier in the debate, for setting up the process to establish the commission for criminal appeals. He did so at a time when the public mood was at fever pitch, only hours after the release of the Birmingham Six.

I remember that day very well, because I took part in "Question Time" and the atmosphere in the studio was electric. The mood was rather confused, however, because, although everyone was quite rightly outraged about miscarriages of justice and about the fact that things had gone seriously wrong, another passion, which was promoting Irish republicanism, was blurring the edges, and those who felt it gave the Birmingham Six a heroes' welcome not just on their release but because they were pushing another cause. In a sense, that was unfortunate, because if there has been a miscarriage of justice, an individual, no matter who he is, is entitled to have the best justice that the country can provide.

It had been found that, among other things, the convictions of the Birmingham Six had rested on uncorroborated confessions. Concern was expressed about faulty, fabricated or withheld evidence, biased comments from judges and the reluctance of the Court of Appeal to overturn jury verdicts.

Today, we must put everything in its correct perspective. Time has not stood still. In recent years, the standards required of the police have been tightened. The codes of practice in the Police and Criminal Act 1984, commonly known as PACE, have virtually eliminated the risk of fabricated confessions. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) pointed out in his excellent speech, nowadays police interviews are tape-recorded. Those codes of practice have served their purpose because allegations against the police have dropped greatly.

None the less, if there is any error of doubt about how evidence or confessions were obtained, the conviction must be set aside. The strength of our system is that we will still admit that an error could have been made, even after the last appeal. I cannot vouch for any other country in the world that sustains our same enormously high standards of justice or goes to the same length of trouble as we do to get things right.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): What does my hon. Friend have to say about identification evidence?

Lady Olga Maitland: I will not comment on that, because it should be considered in another context.

It was quite right for the Home Office to refer back to the Court of Appeal the case of Paul Hill, who was convicted of the IRA murder of 21-year-old Private Shaw in west Belfast. The Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Sir Brian Hutton, concluded that the conviction was unsafe and unsatisfactory. In his 42-page judgment, however, he said that Mr. Hill's credibility was seriously undermined because, on the balance of probabilities, a number of interviews that he claimed took place at Guildford police station never happened.

Sir Brian added that he felt that the Surrey police officers' evidence at the Belfast trial was probably true. However, the only evidence against Mr. Hill was a confession that he signed while under arrest at Guildford police station in connection with the Guildford and Woolwich IRA bombings, in which five people were killed. Sir Brian said he quashed Paul Hill's conviction because it rested on a fundamental principle of law that

"a civilised society cannot permit a confession—even if true—to be obtained by improper methods."

He added that it was "very probable" that Police Constable Gerry Queen fired an unloaded revolver through the hatch of a cell door at Guildford police station and that that "clearly constituted inhuman treatment."

It should be made clear that rendering a conviction unsafe does not necessarily exonerate the appellant; rather, it is the means of setting aside a conviction where there is the slightest doubt about the evidence. I pay tribute yet again to the fact that this country has the courage and the culture to bend over backwards to right a wrong. Whenever there is a sliver of doubt, a case is thrown out.

Mr. Ashby: Can my hon. Friend explain why the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six had to apply three or four times to the Court of Appeal before it finally got its finger out and looked at their cases again? How is that our country bending over backwards to right a wrong?

Lady Olga Maitland: In the end, the cases were reviewed and the verdicts were overturned, so how can my hon. Friend possibly question the outcome?

I welcome the establishment of the independent criminal cases review commission, because the current system is not entirely satisfactory. At present, we have a gamekeeper-poacher relationship, where the C3 department of the Home Office serves as the last resort for alleged miscarriages of justice. It can never be entirely

[Lady Olga Maitland]

satisfactory for a body to be responsible in a quasi-judicial role for such cases, while at the same time being responsible for law and order and the police.

The Home Office, acutely conscious of the sensitivities involved, has tended to err on the side of sluggishness. As Lord Runciman observed in his report:

"The scrupulous observance of constitutional principles has meant a reluctance on the part of the Home Office to inquire deeply enough into the cases put to it . . . We do not think that is likely to change significantly in the future."

The Home Office and the Northern Ireland Office sift through about 750 cases a year, of which, on average, four or five are finally referred to the Court of Appeal. Only a few attract public attention or become causes celebres, such as the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and the Maguires. The rest range from a conviction for possessing a television without a licence or driving without insurance to the most serious offences such as rape, armed robbery or murder.

The most recent references to the Court of Appeal, leaving aside the Guinness trial convictions of Jack Lyons, Ernest Saunders, Anthony Parnes and Gerald Ronson, are a fairly typical list of cases concerning people convicted of serious offences and serving long sentences. Those include Paul Malone, currently serving 15 years for robbery; Sammy Davies, convicted of rape; and Colin Wallace, convicted of manslaughter.

A clear example of miscarriage of justice was the case of Stefan Kiszko, who was convicted of raping and murdering a girl in Derbyshire. He spent many years in prison but always protested his innocence. The Home Office took up his case and found that forensic evidence was unreliable. Since he was first tried nearly 20 years ago, forensic science has developed a great deal, with many safeguards.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): In the Stefan Kiszko case, it was found that forensic evidence had been withheld by the police. That is why that case was overturned.

Lady Olga Maitland: That could be one element of the reason, but I understand that subsequent forensic science has given us another interpretation of the evidence.

Judith Ward was convicted in 1974 of a number of terrorist offences, including murder. In 1991, her case was referred by the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley, after the scientific evidence was put in doubt by the discrediting, in another case, of evidence given by the forensic scientist concerned and after an eminent psychiatrist found that Judith Ward suffered from a mental condition that led her to fantasise and then confess to crimes that she had not committed. In June 1992, the Court of Appeal quashed all her convictions and she was freed having served 17 years in prison for crimes that she had nothing to do with.

I congratulate the Government on being supportive in the proposed establishment of the criminal cases review commission, setting aside a budget of more than £4 million for a staff of up to 60 people and a proposed body of 11. That is certainly no half-hearted measure. Compare that with the Home Office C3 department, which has a staff of 19 and a budget of some £750,000 a year.

Labour Members suggest that that figure and the scope and scale of the commission are insufficient.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): The hon. Lady has given a litany of cases where miscarriages of justice have been put right and referred to cases on which people are currently campaigning. Does she support the attempt by the family of James Hanratty to prove that he was wrongly convicted?

Lady Olga Maitland: I cannot answer that question because I have not studied the case. If there has been a miscarriage of justice and suitable evidence comes to light, I feel absolutely confident that the case will be referred to the Court of Appeal.

If Labour Members are not satisfied with the fact that the commission will have a staff of 60 and a budget of £4 million, it would help the House if they said what they envisage. What do they mean by "inadequate resources"? Would they double the number of staff and the budget? They must be realistic. It is all very well to demand that more resources be given, which is the common cry of the Labour party, but it would be helpful if Labour Members said what budget they would propose.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): The hon. Lady does not seem to be aware that the Police Federation of England and Wales has made it extremely clear that the commission's budget is inadequate if it does not include funding to pay for the officers who must carry out the investigations, for whom substantial extra funding will be needed. The nature of the investigations and the employment of officers mean that the overall funding required will be much higher than the sum suggested by the Government.

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. Gentleman's point sidesteps the whole issue. What I am trying to get out of the Opposition, but which is clearly not forthcoming, is whether they will spend more money on the commission and, if so, how much. They seem to have made yet another open-ended spending pledge. I do not resent spending money on justice for everybody, but we should know exactly where the money will come from and what it will be spent on.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: I queried how the commission will be funded. If the hon. Lady remembers, I spoke of cuts in legal aid. Is she saying that the money saved from cuts in the legal aid budget will be used for the new review body?

Lady Olga Maitland: I do not think for one minute that a sensible approach to handling the legal aid budget can be equated with funding an expansion over and above what the Government propose for the new commission. It is nonsense for the hon. Gentleman to try to suggest that we are robbing Peter to pay Paul. No appellant will be deprived of the appropriate means to secure justice for himself. We are concerned that genuinely wealthy people are claiming support from the legal aid budget to which they are not entitled. There is no question of anyone without resources being unable to get funding for his or her legal defence.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way twice. She said that no one without resources will lack legal aid. Has she had conversations with Ministers in which it has been suggested that legal aid

will be made available for those who are deserving because they have no other resources, or does she not know what she is talking about?

Lady Olga Maitland: I have had constant discussions with my colleagues. My hon. Friends and I are all well aware that those who need it will get the legal support and aid that they need. We are concerned about extremely wealthy people who claim legal aid while living in luxury homes with huge back-up when it is obvious that they have the means to pay for their own defence.

I have no doubt that the commission will initially carry a heavy case load, investigating in a broader way and perhaps in greater depth some cases that are handled by the Home Office. I recognise that inquiries will be speeded up. Apart from big and complicated cases, the average time taken to complete consideration of a case is 36 working days. The commission's make-up is crucial to guarantee public confidence. Its independence and the selection of those who will serve on it are sacrosanct. I agree that it is appropriate that there should be a strong lay input with, as was pointed out in the royal commission report, knowledge and experience of any aspect of the criminal justice system. That will provide for plain common sense backed by an expert knowledge in a particular subject.

I suggest, however, that great care be taken to ensure that there is no danger of any pressure group, such as Liberty, making its presence felt in an area that must be completely apolitical. To err on one side or the other would seriously affect public confidence in the commission. We want people of integrity, probity, judgment and clear-sightedness; we want no whisper of politics, which would turn what should be a scrupulously independent, fair-minded body into a lobby organisation for one group or party or the other. I view that matter with the greatest concern. I trust that, when the body is set up, those independent standards will be maintained both now and in the future.

Some hon. Members have called for an in-house investigatory unit. I regard that as neither practical nor realistic. First, the work load will vary each year. No investigative unit could have all the necessary expertise for every sort of case. It is far better to bring in the appropriate investigators and supervise them from the centre, which has already been done by the serious fraud squad, who bring in accountants. The organisation could bring in forensic scientists or accountants, although it may not need such expert help all the time. In general, different branches of the police force will be used. They have an excellent track record on investigating alleged miscarriages of justice.

I am concerned about remarks made by Labour Members throwing doubt on the integrity of the police force. We heard unworthy gibing and querulousness from Labour Members, suggesting that our police force did not possess the standards of integrity that we demand of it. I accept that occasionally things fall down but, by and large, the police force has an excellent track record. I did not like the complaint of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) that cases referred to the Police Complaints Authority are generally not taken up. Such an insidious statement is not worth listening to—but we have heard it.

It has been suggested that journalists should be among the investigators on the commission. I am proud of my profession as a journalist, but I would never for a moment suggest that it is the right profession to serve on the commission. Labour Members said that they wanted campaigning journalists on the commission, and mentioned Paul Foot. I respect Paul Foot's powers as a writer, but I cannot say that I would feel particularly happy or confident that someone with a clearly defined left-wing bias in his approach to life could deliver a service with which I would feel totally comfortable. We must be scrupulously careful about the make-up of the commission and how it executes its powers.

I am proud that the Bill has come to the House and proud that we in this country will leave no stone unturned in our determination to bring justice for all. It should reassure the public that their last resort appeal will be most carefully considered, and any miscarriage of justice rightly rectified.

8.2 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I welcome the Bill. This is the only such occasion that I can recall when every contributor has started by welcoming the Bill, which is important and has clearly been needed for some time. It meets the public need for a commission. The Opposition want it to be set up and operating as soon as possible, as there is much work to be done.

It is important to set up the commission because the most recent criminal justice Act, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, ended the right to silence and increased the possibility of miscarriages of justice rather than decreased it. Some of the safeguards suggested during the Committee stage of that Bill would, had they been accepted, have reduced the possibility of error. Regrettably, they were not accepted. I hope that cases going through the courts will be monitored to see whether ending the right of silence has achieved what the Government claimed it would—in terms of convictions where convictions were proper—or whether, as we suggested, it has increased the danger of miscarriages of justice.

In welcoming the Bill, I want to focus on those aspects of it which are not quite right. I do not believe, as has been suggested, that the Committee considering the Bill will be entirely without controversy, as some changes are needed. I hope that the Government will give serious consideration to those issues.

I have four serious concerns. My first worry involves the grounds of appeal. Will the grounds of appeal still be too narrow to cover some of the cases which should be considered by the commission?

My second concern involves the extent of the commission's powers. Will it be able to obtain all the evidence that it needs to be able to investigate a case properly?

Thirdly, I am concerned about the independence of any investigation when those conducting it are the same people as those responsible for the original decision. I would like to know the circumstances in which the same police force would be used and the circumstances in which another police force would be used to investigate a particular conviction. I would also like to know the

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circumstances in which it would be right for the commission to have recourse to different procedures and to use different people to do the job.

Fourthly, we must always be concerned about the timing of procedures. There is currently an enormous backlog of many people who have been in prison for a long time.

Those four points have all affected a case in which I have been involved. I shall follow the pattern set down in the debate and not refer by name to the people who believe that they have suffered a miscarriage of justice. I shall refer to the case in a less overt manner. The son of two of my constituents was convicted in December 1987 of having murdered his fiancée in September 1986. He was given a life sentence and has been in prison ever since. He never accepted the result. From the moment of his arrest, he has always protested his innocence.

Before the trial, it was suggested to the man that, given that he was convicted of murdering his fiancée, if he suggested that it had happened in a moment of passion, it could be regarded as manslaughter and he would not be sentenced to so many years. Certainly, if he had at any time accepted his guilt, it is unlikely that he would have served the time that he has already served, the events having taken place more than eight years ago. He has already been in prison a long time, but he has always protested his innocence.

There are genuine grounds for believing that the conviction may be unsafe. I should need to hear the results of a full investigation before making a judgment. The grounds for having an investigation and having recourse to a commission of the sort described are straightforward. The case has been continuing for so long that I took it over from my predecessor, Lord Merlyn Rees, who was himself a distinguished Home Secretary. For the first five years of the case, Merlyn Rees did his best to represent the man and sought, through the relevant procedures, to obtain an appeal. The appeal was turned down because, although the parents had engaged a private detective who had produced a massive and detailed report of the case and had conducted many interviews, lawyers felt that the private detective's report did not amount to new evidence. Therefore, the case never went to the Court of Appeal.

Soon after I won the seat at the last general election, there was an approach from the C3 department of the Home Office after the son of my constituents had been listed by Liberty as a person whose conviction was unsafe. Since then, I and my office have spent many hours examining the evidence and considering possible ways of getting the case reopened. For a long time, we did not produce anything that could be described as new evidence. The reason for that is intrinsic to the case, and therefore it is an important aspect of considering the grounds on which an appeal can be heard.

If the police rapidly reach a conclusion in a murder case and never investigate any alternative interpretations of why the death occurred, it is extremely difficult later to follow up other possible interpretations and other possible leads that are consistent with the opinions of the person who has already been convicted. There is thus an inherent difficulty in dealing with a case which appears to hinge on the fact that the officer in charge of the case reached a certain conclusion about the identity of the person who committed the crime extremely early in the investigation, and never wavered in his conviction.

It is of interest that the same officer, on being transferred to a different force, was in charge of a rape case in which he formed an equally rapid conviction; the person about whom he had formed that conclusion was arrested and imprisoned, and someone else then came into the police station and confessed to the crime. That may simply be coincidental. It may simply be that, in one of the two cases in which the officer reached a rapid conclusion, the person who was in prison had a lucky break, as people do not often confess to a rape when someone else is likely to be in the dock for it. It would have taken a similar sort of break for my constituent's son to have any evidence with which to overturn the strong conviction of the officer in charge of the case. That makes it especially difficult to assemble new evidence in those circumstances. In recent months, however, with the help of a barrister, possible grounds of appeal have been investigated, and a fresh set of advice on appeal has been obtained.

That brings me what I regard as a second important aspect—ensuring that the commission has the right powers to obtain transcripts. There has been one great handicap in the case. We have gone over the evidence, much of which centres around the time of death. The time of death in that case was uncertain because, when the body was discovered, the death was not immediately thought to be a death in suspicious circumstances. The body was therefore refrigerated for 24 hours before there was any investigation of the body to discover the cause of death.

The forensic evidence of Dr. Alan Usher, a noted pathologist in his time, is that some of the alleged conclusions about time of death simply could not properly be drawn because there had been that great gap between death occurring and the corpse being examined, and the refrigeration process had made it impossible to determine the evidence in quite the way in which it was subsequently used.

We do not know, because we have not obtained a transcript of the trial, whether conviction hinged on the time of death. I believe, therefore, that it is important to obtain a transcript. As the case never went to appeal in the first place, however, there is no written transcript; it exists only in shorthand notes. One of the things that I am very worried about is that, since the time when we first asked for those shorthand notes to be preserved, some of them have been destroyed, which I believe should not have happened when a Member of Parliament had expressed a specific interest in the case.

The control of the taking of transcripts in court falls within the Lord Chancellor's domain. I am anxious that the new commission should be in a position to obtain the transcript in a case of that kind, where no transcript of the trial has been obtained. I ask the Minister to tell me in his reply whether the commission will have the powers to obtain a transcript.

I was told that I might obtain a transcript if I were prepared to pay for it myself. It was estimated that the transcript would cost more than £3,200. I was told that it could not count as office costs, which would have meant that it would in effect cost less due to the effect on Inland Revenue payments. It was therefore a case of obtaining legal aid, but legal aid could not be obtained unless there

was to be an appeal; so there was a complete "Catch 22" situation. When the Registrar of the Court of Appeal was told that we needed the evidence, he wrote back saying that if, as a result of obtaining the transcript, it was found that an appeal could be made, the costs of obtaining the transcript would be paid for by the Court of Appeal; if not, we would be left holding the baby, as it were. That does not seem to me to be a reasonable way to proceed.

As a result of telephone conversations, it would appear, between the solicitors who were handling the matter and Master Mackenzie, the Registrar of the Court of Appeal, the Court of Appeal has now decided that at least the judge's summing up will be paid for, and once we obtain the text of the judge's summing up, if that helps in determining whether time of death was a critical factor in the conviction, we may well get the case re-opened.

I am therefore very anxious that the power to obtain transcripts should be available to the commission.

The third matter is independence. I shall not emphasise it at any length because other hon. Members have already spoken about it, but it is very hard if the same force who were responsible for conducting the prosecution and providing evidence for the prosecution have to investigate a miscarriage of justice because, in a sense, miscarriages of justice reflect on those who were involved.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) was quite wrong about the Stefan Kiszko case; that was a deliberate withholding of evidence, and that deliberate withholding of evidence was very much to the discredit of the West Yorkshire police. I do not suggest that many people would be involved—probably very few, perhaps just one or two. Nevertheless, it counts against the force as a whole when that type of thing happens. It is very important that at least a different, independent, police force is involved, as a necessary safeguard.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), therefore, that we need independence. It would not increase costs because with other investigators, and therefore fewer police costs, the cost might be transferred. Perhaps I should also take into account the pace of the process. That man has been in prison for eight and a half years. If the commission is up and running in the next 18 months or sooner, and if it begins by considering cases which have been held up for a long time, it is possible that that case will be examined in three or four years' time. By then, that man will have spent a very long time in prison. We must do something to ensure that the commission is able to progress cases with greater speed than has occurred in the past.

Despite my concerns, I welcome the establishment of the commission and I am anxious to see it up and running and working effectively. I believe that it will be much more effective if some of the changes which I am confident will be proposed in Committee are accepted by the Government, and I hope that the Government will view them objectively because I do not believe that this is a party political issue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are 40 minutes before the wind-up speeches and four hon. Members who wish to speak in the debate. I make a plea that they speak for only 10 minutes each.

8.20 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): It is always dangerous to ask me to speak in a debate on the criminal appeal system. It is always assumed that Conservative Members will support the Establishment, but I believe that, in many respects, the Establishment has let down the country, in criminal appeals and elsewhere, and that it continues to do so. The appeal system should not be considered as infallible—in fact, it has been extremely fallible in many respects for a very long time.

Why do we need the Criminal Appeal Bill? We have had a Court of Appeal since just after the turn of the century, which is supposed to have done its job, reviewing cases and allowing appeals on cases. What has the Court of Appeal done for all those years? By and large, it has not been keen to overthrow convictions. It has been ultra-conservative and felt that it should support the Establishment view rather than adopt a strictly judicial one.

I have no great hopes or aspirations in my career. I do not expect to get on in the Government or to advance my career as a barrister much further. I do not care too much about that; I feel that I must express my views. I do not believe that the Court of Appeal has always behaved in the way that it should. We have only to examine some of the cases. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have cited murder case after murder case, as if to suggest that they are the only cases tried in the courts.

I do not believe that miscarriages of justice are few and far between; I believe that there have been many, and that they will continue into the future. We are talking about a very fallible process: human beings judging other human beings. There have been several recent examples of the fallibility of the jury system. One jury used a ouija board to decide whether a person was guilty. Another jury could not reach a conclusion and the foreman said that the decision was six to four, with two abstentions—as if a juror could abstain!

One often wonders what juries are up to. Thankfully, we are not allowed to ask too many questions; if we did, we might be a little worried about the jury system. The ouija board case involved someone very powerful and the court gave in. The usual argument is: "The jury decided it and we cannot override its decision. All the evidence was put before the jury. The defendant gave evidence, and the jurors decided not to believe him. Blah, blah, blah". In the end, appeals are often rejected out of hand, flying in the face of common sense.

I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) to consider the number of times that the cases of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six came to the court before they finally came to appeal. Why did the Court of Appeal turn down those cases time and again? It failed us, and it failed the system of justice.

I have fought year in and year out over identification evidence. There is no more dangerous evidence than that. I am fallible in that regard: I have recognised my daughter in a hundred places when she was not there. When I was rather naughty in the Chamber, my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) was named instead of me, so I slipped out before I could be named correctly. The badge messengers always mistake me for

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my hon. Friend. That is a personal case of mistaken identification which occurs day in and day out. I am sure that the same sort of thing happens to everyone.

We went to the Court of Appeal with about half a dozen identification cases. The most dreadful miscarriages of justice occurred in the 1970s, and they prompted Lord Devlin to produce a report. He said that people should not be convicted on identification alone; there should also be corroboration. He was absolutely correct, and those of us who practise in the courts know that it is utterly wrong to convict on the basis of identification without corroboration. Yet hundreds of people are convicted every day in magistrates and Crown courts on identification evidence alone, without any corroboration.

I hope that you will tip me the wink when my 10 minutes is up, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I do not remember when I started to speak. When I get on my high horse, I tend to get rather excited.

In the R *v.* Turnbull direction on identification evidence, the Court of Appeal failed totally to meet any of the Devlin recommendations. It was a complete cop-out, and it has been copping out ever since on the question of identification evidence. That situation will continue, because I do not see the Court of Appeal changing its approach.

Only the other day, I had a case involving identification. The initial description offered by a witness, who had been with the defendant for only half an hour, was totally different from the appearance of the man he identified nine months later. That case resulted in a conviction because juries are like that. I am sure that the Court of Appeal would say that the jury heard all the evidence, and we should leave it at that.

We must look beyond the criminal cases review commission and examine the fundamentals of our criminal justice system. We must consider whether it is as good and as impartial as it should be, or whether it is a case of the great and the good lining their own pockets. I am terribly afraid when I hear my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam say that the right people must serve on the criminal cases review commission. In saying that we must not have people from Liberty or Justice, she means that the great and the good and the right wingers should serve on the commission. They will look at cases like those of the Guildford Four and of the Birmingham Six and they will say, "We must not consider that case. It is a perfectly good conviction and we are perfectly happy with it. It should not be referred to the Court of Appeal." There will be refusals at the commission and the Court of Appeal levels, and the injustices will continue.

I believe that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is the right person to chair the commission—although I suppose that he is happier fighting for his causes in this place. When the hon. Gentleman first came to the Chamber we thought that he was a loony lefty, pursuing ridiculous cases of failures of justice. We all thought that he was a very silly man; but he was right all the time. The more one talks to him, the more one realises that he makes good sense about the need for an impartial judicial system.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam, who is not in her place, that we must be jolly careful about the commission's membership. We do not necessarily want right wingers or the great and the good; we want people of independent minds, and we want the opportunity to use independent investigators. I am horrified at the thought that such investigators will never be used. The police might do 90 per cent. of the time, but somebody else may be needed the other 10 per cent. I look forward in Committee to giving the commission more scope and chance. I obviously support the Bill, but trust that I have fired sufficient warning shots across everybody's bows. I hope that I have not disappointed anybody.

8.30 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I want to maintain the record by joining other hon. Members in welcoming the Bill. Given the long history attached to it, I am surprised that it has taken the Home Secretary so long to present it. Public confidence in the criminal justice system has been completely undermined by cases such as the Birmingham Six, Judith Ward, the Guildford Four, the Maguire Seven, the Cardiff Three and Stefan Kiszko. Between 1989 and 1992, more than 50 people were released from prison as a result of miscarriages of justice, which reflects points made by the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby).

Some people—including senior figures in the judiciary—adhere to the utilitarian theory of justice. They argue that, in the event of a terrorist bombing of a pub, if some suspects are apprehended quickly, tried and convicted, it does not much matter whether they are guilty or innocent, because the bulk of the population will have a sense of security and enjoy peace of mind. Although that theory is shocking when presented baldly, it is credible for some jurists and members of the judiciary, and it has often overlain attitudes to so-called and real miscarriages of justice.

The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) established the royal commission on 14 March 1991. From earlier speeches, it is clear that that was the least that the right hon. Gentleman could have done. The royal commission reported 18 months ago and recommended a body such as that proposed in the Bill, but with considerable differences.

The history of support for such a body goes back a long way. In 1968, Justice recommended that such a body should be established, and the Home Affairs Select Committee reported in 1983. Sir John May's second report on the Maguire case was published on 3 December 1992. There were amendments at the Report stage of the Criminal Justice Bill in 1987, and former Home Secretaries who supported an independent element included the current Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Mole Valley. Few cases have been referred—only 10 in 1994, and at 1 January 1995, 38 cases had been outstanding in the C3 department longer than one year.

I introduced a ten-minute Bill on miscarriages of justice on 16 February 1993. I commend that Bill to members of the Government Front Bench, if for no reason other than it is drafted in gender-neutral language. I record my thanks to members of the Public Bill Office, who helped me to achieve that. The Criminal Appeal Bill is full of "he" and "him". No doubt we will be told that, for legal purposes, "he" embraces "she"—but "she" sometimes gets a bit fed up being embraced by "he" in legislation. I

ask those responsible to examine my ten-minute Bill, to see that it is perfectly possible to draft legislation that applies to both sexes.

The Criminal Appeal Bill has major flaws. My Bill provided that

"any person convicted of a criminal offence on indictment or that person's legal representative"

could apply, but under the Government's Bill, the Court of Appeal offers the only route. A logjam seems inevitable. Also, the culture of the Court of Appeal is somewhat hostile to the overturning of jury verdicts or of the findings of judges of first instance.

I was pleased to hear from the Home Secretary that vacancies for commission membership will be advertised, but it is important that the criteria for appointment should be known and published. It would be better if the Lord Chancellor were responsible for overseeing appointments, as recommended by the royal commission, rather than the Prime Minister or Home Secretary. Those appointments should be handled by someone who does not hold direct political office but who is responsible for the judiciary.

Clause 13(1)(a) sets a high threshold from the referral of cases from the commission to the Court of Appeal. It refers to

"any argument or evidence . . . which gives rise to a real possibility that the conviction, verdict or finding would not be upheld".

The test of "real possibility" is too hard. It would be better to substitute the words, "relevant", or, "capable of belief", which are used in clause 4. Lord Devlin said once that a conviction is not safe if the jury has not heard all credible and relevant evidence. That would be a more acceptable hurdle than "real possibility".

There must also be rules to provide a duty to preserve or retain all evidence after conviction on indictment. That is possible, with the use of microfiche, without taking much space. Such evidence should be preserved for the duration of a sentence. All too often, when someone wants to argue a miscarriage of justice, it is found that the police have had a spring clean. There is not necessarily a malign motive, but evidence goes missing—often, evidence that was not put before the jury. The retention of evidence is important to someone who wants to claim a miscarriage of justice. Also, in a case such as that of the West Midlands serious crime squad, which was found to be riddled with corruption, police officers cannot be brought to book if evidence has disappeared. A rule that evidence must be retained and preserved would serve the interests of justice.

Many Members questioned whether investigating officers should be independent of the police. I will not rehearse those arguments, but I believe that they should be. We have only to look to Hong Kong to know that such independence is possible. That territory is one over which we have jurisdiction and where the staff of a comparable body to the commission is independent of the police. I am told by lawyers who have appeared in courts in Hong Kong that the system works well, and that there is no reason why it should not work here.

I echo the warning that it would be unwise to use the Police Complaints Authority as a model. On the day that the PCA came into being, the Police Federation said:

"It will not enhance public confidence in the system and will probably not improve police morale either. We remain firmly of the view that only a wholly independent system of investigation will satisfy all parties."

There has been reference to proper funding of this body. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who introduced the only party political aspect to this debate—to put it tactfully—questioned how much the body would cost. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) who, in his absence, has been recommended for the post of first chairman of the commission—

Mr. Mullin: They are just trying to get rid of me from the Select Committee.

Ms Corston: I think that it was meant as a compliment. In any case, my hon. Friend correctly pointed out the huge cost of investigating miscarriages of justice. He cited cases where there had been eight separate investigations, incurring untold expenditure. Justice does not come cheap; proper funding of this body is therefore essential.

The Bill should include some rules to provide for legal aid for appeals to the commission. Although access to legal aid has been cut drastically by the Government, such provision as remains should be extended to people applying to this body. If there is no access to justice, there is no justice. It is important that people who want to raise important matters of law in respect of their personal liberty should not be debarred through lack of funds.

This is not just a matter of public confidence; it is a matter of supreme importance for our criminal justice system and for people's faith in it, which has been considerably undermined. The people put behind bars should be the people who committed the crimes for which they were convicted.

The fact that people routinely do not believe in the safety of convictions does none of us any good and is a stain on our criminal justice system. It astonishes me that people are so ready to believe that there have been so many miscarriages of justice. None of us can be proud of the fact that there are so many. I hope that, in Committee, it will be possible constructively to raise some of these matters. I hope, furthermore, that we will not behave as the courts have often behaved: no one seems to have a duty to find out the truth, but we are asked to believe one of two stories.

8.42 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I begin with a moment of cross-party amity with the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston), whose remarks about the irritation caused by the continual use of "he" and "him" I endorse. Surely the language can come up with alternative ways of handling the problem. It is a long-running irritant that needs dealing with. I also find the phrase "he embraces she" irritating.

I say that as one looking forward to attempting the new right-on green embrace widely advertised in today's papers. I have not yet had a go at it—*[Interruption.]*—and I hasten to add that I shall not be trying it out with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), whose speech was enormously entertaining and powerful. I would willingly have sacrificed some of my time to hear more of his bravura performance.

Incidentally, my hon. Friend seemed to have reservations about juries, and I understand his concern. It is worth thinking about the issue, because it relates to the wider one of rights and responsibilities. We all want the

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right to be tried by a jury, but many of us try to avoid the responsibility of serving on juries. I often meet people who say that they would do anything to get out of it—they get their employers to send letters claiming that they are not free and cannot attend. If we want to be tried by juries—most people do—we should also accept the responsibility of being ready to serve on one.

Many hon. Members who have spoken today have declared an interest. I am a layman. I have an interest to declare among my antecedents: I am the son and grandson of lawyers. My declaration of interest covers both sides of the legal divide, in that a forebear of mine, Jeremiah Brandreth, was the last person to be hanged and then beheaded for treason in England—in 1812. Unfortunately, the commission was not around then; otherwise that miscarriage of justice would have gone straight to it.

Jeremiah was a Luddite, known in his time as the hopeless radical. I see myself more as a hopeful radical, which is why I am so pleased to welcome this Bill. At its heart is the need to maintain full public confidence in the criminal justice system. Ensuring that it operates fairly is essential if we are to maintain that public confidence.

The Government have already taken a number of steps to increase the chances of the guilty being properly convicted. I take issue here with the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) and his objections concerning the right to silence. I think that the Government have moved in the right direction—likewise with the establishment of the DNA database and the changing of the identity parade procedures to prevent their abuse. All these are important.

It is equally important that only the guilty be convicted. The Bill is designed to ensure that that happens, and that, when miscarriages of justice occur, there is a fair and efficient system to put them right. It is also vital that any appeals system—this too underlies the Bill's principles—ensure that convictions that cannot be considered safe are quashed, leaving those that are safe to stand.

When the innocent are found guilty, it is every bit as much a miscarriage of justice as when the guilty are acquitted. Doubts about the safety of a conviction must be resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, preferably at the normal appeals stage. A last resort procedure should be just that: it should not be regarded as an extra stage in the standard criminal justice process.

There must also be consistency of approach in criminal proceedings, so that all the final decisions are taken by the courts.

I want to ask the Minister a couple of questions in the hope that he may answer them when he winds up. Hon. Members have discussed the membership of the commission, whose members are to be appointed by Her Majesty on the advice of the Prime Minister, as I understand it. Can the Minister confirm that the posts of chairman and of all the board members will be advertised? If so, in what sort of publications? I understand that at least one third of the membership have to be legally qualified, and two thirds of them must have some direct experience of the criminal justice system. I should like the advertising of public posts generally to be greatly extended.

Having become a Member of Parliament, one increasingly meets people who belong to that group known as the great and the good. Occasionally they appear to be something of a stage army; one moves from one group to another only to find that the same names and faces, and the same types of name and face, recur. It would be good to take advantage of some of the country's untapped talent who would be willing to serve. The advertising and its placing are thus crucial.

The only anxiety about the Bill expressed in my constituency was put to me in the following simple terms: "Won't this Bill allow the police to investigate themselves? Are you comfortable with that? Wouldn't it be better to have some separate investigative unit?" I am comfortable with the idea, chiefly because of what I read in clauses 18,19 and 20. It appears that clause 18 will empower the commission to require the appointment of investigating officers to assist it in the exercise of its functions, and it can stipulate that those investigating officers come from a public body other than a body which originally investigated the offence.

The commission's direct supervision and investigation are important also. Clause 20 does not preclude the commission from obtaining opinions, commissioning reports and taking other steps to assist it in the exercise of its functions. I feel comfortable with that, because of the use of officers from other forces, where appropriate, and because of the commission's ability to ask for reports from outside bodies.

I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) said about the role and standing of the police in our society. We are so often negative about everything. Instead of saluting our great institutions, as people would in other parts of the world, we take the opposite approach. We do not seek to build them up.

The only place where Great Britain does not have a great reputation is Great Britain. Our police are the envy of the world. We should be erecting statues to our police force in honour of what it contributes to our society, instead of constantly trying to chip away and undermine it. I salute the police of the United Kingdom, and I am comfortable with what the Government are proposing.

I should like to know whether my hon. Friend the Minister of State shares the concern that was expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) in a typically compelling intervention. The Bill states that representations are received on about 730 cases each year, and there is the expectation that such representations may double when the proposed commission is in place. My hon. Friend talked also about growing evidence of what might be called single-issue lobby groups.

There are days when I think to myself that the world is being run on "Today". I can almost foresee a time when, heaven forfend, an issue will arise and will be discussed on "Today". One side will put its point of view in about two minutes, to be followed by the other side, which similarly puts its point of view. The listener will then be invited to press a button on the radio to deliver a verdict. That would not be satisfactory, but unfortunately, there is a tendency for that approach to be adopted.

It will be far better to have a commission that investigates matters properly than to rely on campaigns that are driven, and sometimes fuelled, by those in the media, who may be interested in trouble-making as an exercise in entertainment and chasing audiences rather than reaching the facts.

I have no doubt that the cause of justice will be well served by the Bill. That is why I warmly welcome it.

8.52 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I begin by joining the general welcome for the Bill and our discussion of miscarriages of justice. It has been a constructive and largely bipartisan debate. My constituents often complain that Members are always arguing with one another. The problem is that journalists often do not report Members who make constructive contributions to debates where there is an element of bipartisanship.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Where are they?

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend suggests from a sedentary position that there might not be as much press interest as there should be in this sort of debate. I hope that tomorrow we shall read in the newspapers of the importance that has been accorded to the debate, which goes to issues that are central to confidence in our criminal justice system.

The debate has been conducted in a high-minded and generally bipartisan manner. The problem is that the press seems always to go for conflict rather than consensus. That is partly the result of editorial judgments, which can be questioned. I hope that the press will respond to my plea for some publicity for the Bill, but I suspect that it probably will not.

I was pleased with the speech of the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby). I congratulate him on a bravura performance. I should declare an interest as parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales. Today, however, I shall express my own views. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) has already set out the views of the federation. As I shall talk about legal aid, I should mention that I am a non-practising solicitor. I used to practise criminal law.

The Bill is a step forward, but it needs amendment. There should be independence in the way in which investigations are carried out, and there is not at present. I hope that the Bill will emerge from consideration in Committee in a better form.

The fact that the Bill is before us on Second Reading is due to the involvement of a number of hon. Members, and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who is not presently in his place. I well remember the day on which he was described by *The Sun* as the most odious man in Britain. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are now praising his integrity and judgment, given the way that he fought to ensure that we had a criminal justice system of which we could be prouder than we had a right to be in the past. Praise of my hon. Friend is well justified, as it is of other hon. Members on both sides of the House who have already been mentioned.

Miscarriages of justice such as the Birmingham Six, the Maguire Seven, the Guildford Four, Judith Ward and Stefan Kiszco have all undermined confidence in the criminal justice system. As a lawyer who practised criminal law, I believe that juries are the best way of dealing with serious criminal cases. However, as the hon. Member for Leicester, North-West said, they are all too often fallible instruments, especially when dealing with evidence that is inadequate or contaminated, or where there is widespread public anger and demand for a conviction.

I well remember the case of the Birmingham Six because I come from the west midlands. I know that the jury relied on evidence that was put before it at the trial at Lancaster that was not good. It was forensic evidence, and the jury thought that it had the right to rely on evidence presented by someone of the supposed professional integrity of Frank Skuse, the forensic scientist. He provided it with what appeared to be incontrovertible evidence of guilt, which subsequently had to be dismissed for what has been termed "limited efficiency". That means, basically, that he was incompetent.

The jury relied on that evidence, and in some ways it had a right to do so. It relied on the integrity of that evidence, but it proved not to be accurate evidence. As a result, the Birmingham Six—this happened in other cases—went to prison. People went to prison who perhaps should never have gone to prison.

There is great pressure on juries. Again, I well remember the Birmingham Six case. There was enormous public outrage after the bombings, especially in the west midlands. Anger was expressed by many people. Fear was expressed by Irish people who lived in the area. A number of incidents occurred, and there was a great desire for convictions. The trial had to be transferred from Birmingham to Lancaster.

The jury considered the case in circumstances of enormous media interest and great public anger. It was righteous anger, in the sense that an appalling atrocity had been committed. In the circumstances, it would have been difficult for jurors to be unaware of the enormous pressure that was being put on them. It would have taken a brave jury to acquit.

Respect for the criminal justice system depends on us having confidence that it is a system that delivers justice. We must be satisfied that it is impartial between individuals and enforcement of the law.

According to an ancient axiom, justice must not only be done but be seen to be done. In most cases, the central concern about police involvement in the investigation of cases—especially when questions are raised about the actions of other police officers—relates more to perception than to reality; similarly, confidence in a legal system often involves perceptions of that system.

I accept the Home Secretary's contention that many miscarriages of justice have been corrected by the efforts of serving police officers who have investigated the quality of evidence—and, on occasion, their own colleagues. For many years, however, concern has been expressed about the police investigating themselves: although officers from other forces may carry out such investigations, the practice has been criticised on the ground that it does not appear to be sufficiently independent.

In practice, few problems have arisen, but the procedure leaves the police open to accusations by aggrieved parties. That is surely unnecessary: we need not have a system that allows such accusations, or perceptions, to exist. I believe that an independent investigation that is also of high quality can be introduced. The enhancement of independence will ensure that the commission is perceived as impartial and that its

[Mr. O'Brien]

judgments can be relied on—and we can achieve that, if we can also ensure that the quality of the investigation is high.

Hon. Members have suggested a number of ways of avoiding the need for serving police officers in other forces to be seconded to the commission for brief periods to investigate specific cases. We could provide a core staff including investigators; those investigators could be officers who had retired from the force because of injury, and who, although unable to carry out their duties on the streets, would be able to conduct investigations of this kind. Officers who had recently ceased to carry out investigation duties would be able to bring up-to-date knowledge of investigation technique to their new responsibilities, along with experience of the way in which the police put cases together.

As the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) pointed out, we could also use the many officers who have recently retired from the force. As such officers would not owe allegiance to the force in the future, they would be perceived as entirely independent: it would be assumed that, in their work for the commission, they would not need to be careful about how they dealt with serving police officers. Serving officers could also be seconded to the commission for a period—a substantial period, I hope. Some senior officers could conduct high-quality investigations.

It is important to bear in mind that the independence to which I refer will protect the police as well: it will protect their impartiality. Once their actions have been verified by a more independent group of investigators, no one will be able to allege impropriety in the investigation.

The Home Office says that such an arrangement might well cost much more, because it would require a larger core of investigators; the Police Federation fears that the Home Office has not recognised the substantial extra cost that would result from the use of serving police officers to investigate cases for the commission. In any event, I do not think that the cost would be much greater.

We must ensure that the correct cases come before the commission. Legal aid is important to the achievement of that end: the commission must be able to distinguish between real miscarriages of justice and frivolous cases. I am sure that many criminals will "try it on". The best way of dealing with that is to enable the defence to provide the commission with properly prepared briefs. Complainants and their solicitors must also be regularly informed of the progress of investigations, and allowed to make representations to the commission about the direction of those investigations.

I hope that the Minister will give us an assurance about the availability of legal aid. As has been pointed out by his own side, the Bill does not make the position clear. When I asked the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) about the matter, she appeared to reassure me that legal aid would be available; she said that she had regular discussions with Home Office Ministers. It is now incumbent on the Minister to tell us whether we can rely on that assurance.

The cost of providing the larger core and of providing the legal aid will be significant but, in terms of the overall cost, the Bill is important, as it goes to the heart of restoring confidence in our legal system. The cost of that confidence may be greater than the Home Office is willing to spend at the moment, but the price of a lack of confidence will, in my view, be much greater.

I welcome the Bill. I look forward to it being strengthened in Committee, and to a reduction in the number of miscarriages that we see in our criminal justice system in Britain.

9.4 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): It is recorded somewhere in the annals of Welsh mythology that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) opened an Adjournment debate at 3 am, he sent his mother a tape of his speech. The following week, he heard her telling her neighbour that when her son, Gareth, spoke in the House, "You could hear a pin drop—in contrast to the noise, commotion and fury when Neil Kinnock or that Mrs. Thatcher tried to make themselves heard." The fact that there is no noise in the background to this debate may reflect a lack of controversy, but the fact that it has been a quiet and serious debate should not be allowed to diminish interest in this important Bill.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) that sound, fury and disagreement on principle is not enough to arouse interest in the press and the media. I voted for the television cameras to come into the House, in the hope that they would help to inform the public of the serious issues that we debate. Their failure to record a single sitting of the Committee that considered either the Criminal Justice Bill or the Police and Magistrates Courts Bill in the previous Session was a disgrace. It is neither controversy nor quiet debate that seems to draw proper attention to some of the most important issues that we discuss in the House. It was appropriate that my hon. Friend's serious contribution, in which he raised a number of issues that must be debated in Committee, should close what has been such a good debate.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), I welcome the Bill. I welcome it with relief, because its gestation period has been equivalent to that of an elephant. It has taken a long time for the Bill to reach the Floor of the House. It will require hard work in Committee to ensure that the right Bill emerges. Concern was expressed by a variety of hon. Members on a number of points of detail, and a number of those points remain unclear.

I assure Ministers that we will bring a constructive approach to the discussions in Committee, with a view to returning to the Floor of the House a Bill to which we can give whole-hearted support and which will command the whole-hearted support of both sides of the House. It sounds rather boring, but that is our objective. If Ministers will share in the search for consensus, we will certainly play our part.

I am concerned about the availability of resources. I hope that the Minister will come prepared for a serious discussion on that issue in Committee, or, perhaps, reassure us this evening if he can. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) dismissed that concern with her customary cavalier attitude. The trouble is that there appears to be an intention to depend on the resources of the police. If demands on the police are considerable, it could bleed the local police—in different parts of the country at different times—of the staff that are necessary to undertake their normal duties.

There is some concern that those resources have been underestimated. If that is balanced by drawing off local police, which would result in a decline in the availability of senior officers at local level, that will be sad. Local communities should not pay the price for us getting our sums wrong at this stage. I believe that that will be an important discussion for us to have in Committee.

I must contrast the confused contribution of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam with the constructive approach adopted by Conservative and Opposition Members and by the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary. By claiming the profession of journalist, she made the case against employing journalists in a way that was as devastating as it was unconscious and unintended.

It is in the best interests of the police that any case which may involve bad practice or the misuse of police powers should be objectively investigated, and it is also in the best interests of the police that that investigation should be as searching as it is fair. I think that that is the general belief of the police themselves. It is in the interests of the police, the public and those who may be the subject of miscarriages that there should be confidence on all sides in the body that we have set out to establish through the Bill.

It would have done the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam good to listen to the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), who spelled out the precise reasons for rejecting complacency. Given the fragility of the whole system and the fact that our criminal justice system depends on fallible human beings, we would be foolish to put misplaced confidence in the idea that everyone in our prisons deserves to be there. That is not a reason to give up hope or to swing too far in ignoring evidence: it is a real life challenge. The true friends of our criminal justice system are those who love justice first and the system second.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has been identified by hon. Members in all parts of the House as a friend of justice rather than an old softie. That is absolutely right. I know from my knowledge of my hon. Friend that he is as concerned to see the guilty convicted as to see the innocent cleared. If in the course of pursuing one, we are accused of neglecting the other, we certainly need to consider our balance. My hon. Friend need have no concern in that regard, because he has been tough-minded on both. It is important to get that balance right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) was right to be positive about the body that we are establishing, and right to highlight the delay in setting up such a mechanism. That makes it all the more important to get it right. There are questions to be answered. How will cases come to the attention of the body? Access has been mentioned and is in the Bill via a referral by the Appeal Court, but what about other mechanisms? Will a convicted person who claims that there has been a miscarriage of justice be able to ask directly that the body should investigate the alleged miscarriage? Will referral from hon. Members be acceptable? We are often approached, sometimes inappropriately, but people often feel that as their elected representatives we can put them in touch with the authorities which will look after their interests.

It is correct that the right of the Home Secretary to refer to the Court of Appeal should be replaced in the course of establishing that body, but what of the Home Secretary's right to appeal to it? Those matters are not set out, but they are important. People's expectations of the body are important and those matters need to be spelled out in the Bill. I hope that the Minister will be able to give some answers in his response to the debate. If he does not, these issues will need to be pursued in Committee.

I pay tribute to all those who have worked so hard to get us to this point. The Bill has not happened by accident, nor has it come from the Home Secretary's goodness of heart. I say that even though I am being nice to him today. It is the result of a great deal of hard work, representations and pressure, and because of the willingness of people such as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South to take a great deal of stick and criticism in pursuing a cause that they believe to be right. My hon. Friend has been praised by hon. Members in all parts of the House for his objectivity. That probably worries him more than a savage attack by a Minister.

Such praise is right. In a democracy, there is a need for people to stand up for what they believe is right and on behalf of people whom they think need defending, even when that is unpopular. That stance has been thoroughly vindicated. I am sure that my hon. Friend must feel some satisfaction from seeing the Bill in the House, even though, characteristically and rightly, he expresses reservations about the Bill as it stands. He shares with others the concern that the Bill needs to be improved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) introduced a detailed Bill, which was borrowed for amendments during the Committee stage of the Criminal Justice Bill—so her Bill was debated in this place in detail, as well as in general. With other colleagues—in particular, a former Member of the House, Lord Archer of Sandwell—we have tabled amendments on a series of Criminal Justice Bills, with the aim of expediting the establishment of the body that we are discussing today.

We are left with a big job for the Committee stage. One aspect that we need to consider is the role of the Appeal Court. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) referred to concerns about its operation. We want to ensure that difficulties do not remain after the passage of the Bill.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) referred to the need to improve the criminal justice system to avoid miscarriages. I agree. Confidence is all the more fragile as a result of some of the more ill-judged elements of the Criminal Justice Act 1994, when the advice of the royal commission was ignored by the Home Secretary when he brought forward his recommendations. It makes it all the more important that protection should be put in place.

As a number of hon. Members have said, there is a need for a balance between convicting the guilty and protecting the innocent. No one can be content that our criminal justice system does either to perfection. The tendency to fragmentation is worrying and we need to get the different parts working in complementary fashion. It must be objectively seen to be clear who does what, but the different bits also need to complement each other.

[Mr. Alun Michael]

I accept the general dependence, for example, on serving police officers as investigators. That proposal is not in dispute. However, what is in dispute is whether that dependence should be absolute and also the nature of the supervision of those who undertake the investigation.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) rightly said that immense sums of money are spent on legal aid and on the criminal justice system. In fact, there are three aspects on which we spend too little—victims, prevention of crime and reoffending, and tackling injustice, which is the subject of our debate today. We need to redress that balance within the system.

The hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), depending heavily on the excellent Library brief—paying something of a tribute to the work of the House of Commons Library—

Mr. Garnier: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to allow me to interrupt him. I did not actually refer to the Library brief at all.

Mr. Michael: It is interesting that there seemed to be a certain similarity between the brief and what the hon. Gentleman said. I took it as a compliment to the Library system. He made a curious reference to legislation by postcard. It is important that we do not allow that reference simply to pass, because the right to petition predates Parliament and the use of that particular form is one that should not be criticised as much as it has been in some quarters during recent times.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to his hope that the latest development will be the last for some time. I hope that he is right, but it depends on our work in Committee—where, I hope, we will avoid the party political knockabout and instead seek ways to improve the Bill so that we can avoid the dangers highlighted during the debate.

The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) said that investigating officers should be from a different force from that which originally investigated the case. Underlying that point is the important fact that justice must not only be done, but must be seen to be done. Therefore, the separation of responsibilities is important.

That is nowhere more important than in relation to the delicate issue of miscarriage of justice. We need to hear from Ministers how the investigation will be overseen, who will have the duty to set out the scope of police inquiries, including the number and rank of officers to be involved, the time scale and the likely cost. Who will direct and supervise all inquiries and certify that they have been satisfactorily completed? Is that a responsibility of the commission? It is not clear in the Bill, where responsibility appears to be split between the commission and the chief constable whose staff are seconded to undertake any investigation.

There are six aspects to the issue of objectivity and to ensuring that the commission is seen to be able to carry out its functions in a way that will inspire confidence on all sides. One is the matter of access to the commission.

Mr. Michael O'Brien—not the hon. Member, I hasten to add, but a constituent of mine—should be as familiar to hon. Members as my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North. He has written to every one of them at least once, and to all Members of the House of Lords at least as frequently. He has put across to hon. Members his belief that he is the victim of a miscarriage of justice. Will the commission be able to scrutinise that sort of case, where a difficulty exists in finding new evidence? It is important that such questions and the question of time limits that could place an artificial limit on investigations should be discussed in detail in Committee.

The second aspect of the independence of the commission is the mode of appointment. Obviously, it is a positive step to advertise to raise interest in being appointed to the commission, but it is also important that the commission should be seen to be appointed through an objective process and, therefore, to be balanced and to inspire confidence. That point has been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I hope that the Government will give it some thought. The Minister may be able to be positive about that point in Committee.

The third aspect is the commission's scope to investigate miscarriages of justice. The definition of the commission's responsibilities should be wide enough to allow for difficult cases. The threshold for investigation and for referral is an important point for debate. It was raised by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), as well as by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard).

Difficulties exist in other parts of the criminal justice system. The Crown Prosecution Service appears to be constrained from prosecuting in cases where it is generally felt that prosecution should follow. Such a constraint occurs in what is described as the public interest, but it may have more to do with a general financial constraint than with the specific case.

The Police Complaints Authority has been undermined by dissatisfaction about the way in which complaints are investigated. Part of that dissatisfaction involves worry about the investigation at the early stage—the investigation in the police force, where informal resolution too often appears. If there is genuine informal resolution, that is fine, but I and my hon. Friends are aware of cases where everyone believes that a case has been resolved informally except the person who has made the complaint, to whom it comes as a complete shock.

The pressure from the inspectorate for an increased percentage of informal resolutions is being exerted in the wrong direction. Such dissatisfaction has been caused in relation to the South Wales police, although I believe that that has been accepted, and that the matter is in the process of being set right. It is even more important that there should be confidence that the body that we are seeking to establish has the capacity to set matters right.

The threshold referred to by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) is an important issue, which needs to be debated fully in Committee. We should discuss whether there should be a limitation on issues not already raised. I thoroughly agreed with the hon. Gentleman's point. We should not play a game. We should not think that anything is okay as long as it is being done by the rules. We need to ensure that the commission is able to deal with real miscarriages rather than be too hidebound.

The fourth point, therefore, is the test. Is "unsafe" too high a test to set? Should we accept the royal commission's recommendation that the test should be

"is or may be unsafe"?

I was not convinced by the Home Secretary's suggestion, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, that the choice of the higher threshold was a result of consultations.

The point is that, where there is a lurking doubt about a prosecution—a lurking doubt about a decision of the courts—there should be a capacity to investigate and to ensure that certainty is achieved, as far as is humanly possible. If we set the threshold too high, far too many cases in which there is no confidence in the outcome reached by the courts will not be capable of investigation by the commission. That will undermine confidence in the commission and will fatally undermine the commission in doing the job that the Bill sets it up to do.

Tied with that point is the oversight of investigators and the capacity of the commission to have its own staff who can oversee the investigations. That leads me to the fifth point, which is the accountability of the investigating officer. It is clear that the investigating officer is to be appointed by his or her own chief constable. It is explicit in the Bill that the report will be made both to the commission and to the chief constable. Is that sensible? Is it properly balanced? Is there not a split of responsibilities and a split of supervision as a result of the mechanism contained in the Bill?

The accountability of the police, following the centralising influence of the Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994, should not be totally disregarded in emphasising the importance of the investigations being objective and accountable to the independent and responsible authority. The responsibility of seconded officers to the commission is therefore important, and it underlines the importance of the commission having the capacity for oversight.

That brings me to the sixth point, which is the right of the commission to have an independent capacity to investigate. For the commission to be totally dependent on the police and for it to be ruled out from any approach other than police investigation would surely be too limiting. It may only be in a minority of cases that anything else is required, but that minority of cases should be catered for in the Bill.

We should have a body that is capable, on occasions, of having an innovative approach to getting at the truth. Reference has been made to the Bridgewater case and a number of cases in which repeated investigations have not cleared up the remaining doubt about the safety of prosecution.

We should not look just at what the courts have examined already; this is not just about process. Although the involvement of the police is important, we should not disregard the pressures on the police, a point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) earlier. The police have limited cash, which is being limited even more. They have been slimmed down, especially in respect of supervisory ranks. In some places there are one or two superintendents where previously there were five officers at superintendent or chief superintendent level. That reduces considerably the availability of people to be seconded to undertake a major investigation for an extended period.

I have concerns in my own area, where, for example, the Llanishen and Rhymney divisions have been merged, which is a mistake because it makes the division too big. One can imagine the position if the officer who had the task of supervising the whole area was taken off for a time to conduct an investigation. Those are the very officers who will be needed for the oversight of investigations.

Questions remain to be discussed in Committee. There are, for example, the concerns of the hon. Member for Upper Bann about the special needs of Northern Ireland and about balancing the knowledge of law in the communities there with the requirements of objectivity and independent scrutiny. There are questions over the retention of evidence by the defence as well as the prosecution, and debate about who does what between the Police Complaints Authority and the commission. It is clear that some miscarriages have arisen from investigation by the Police Complaints Authority of allegations of misconduct by the police. There is a need for some overlap between the authority and the commission, but I would not want it to be drawn so tightly that the lines of demarcation were so clear that people or cases could fall between them. What is expected of those two bodies should be clarified.

The Home Secretary referred to identifying possible miscarriages as being a responsibility of the commission. Identifying is an interesting word to use, when "investigating" is the one that springs more readily to the lips. Perhaps that usage will be explained to us as the debate on the Bill continues.

The need for the commission to be visibly independent of the Government and the courts is undoubted and agreed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The need for that commission to be independent also of the police or other authorities is equally important in those cases where that is an issue. I hope that that need, together with the question of the level of the threshold, will be subject to serious debate in Committee.

I agree with the Home Secretary that we need a simple and understandable test. That test, however, should be the right one. A higher threshold than necessary may unintentionally obstruct the search for justice and undermine confidence. That would be a grave mistake.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said that the Bill should foster the confidence of the public in the courts, the police and the system that regulates both. We need a Bill that covers all eventualities and allows confidence to be expressed in all aspects of the criminal justice system. We cannot be confident that nothing will ever go wrong again, but confident that a proper body exists to deal with matters when they go wrong.

The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), the hopeful radical, talked about the responsibility of being a member of a jury. He is quite right about that. I recall sitting in court for the first time as a magistrate, having sat in the back of the court on numerous occasions to observe the proceedings. That weight of responsibility is extremely heavy.

What came into my mind during my early days on the bench was the enormity of the responsibility when deciding between two cases; deciding between right and wrong and on guilt and innocence. That responsibility should not be underestimated, even when, after a long period in the courts, it is possible for people to become numbed, and therefore perhaps sometimes unable to distinguish properly the acute necessity of getting it right. That is why I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of the process of appointment of the chairman and members of the commission.

[Mr. Michael]

I hope that the Minister will give a positive response to many of the serious concerns that have been expressed, especially as they have been put forward constructively by both Conservative and Opposition Members. There is a welcome consensus on the principle of the Bill. It is welcome that we have reached that point at least in political debate on miscarriages of justice. I hope that by the end of the Report stage, if not the Committee stage, we will have equal consensus on the detail of the Bill.

If we can achieve that, the Government and Opposition will have cause for pride, but if we fail, it will not be for the lack of trying on the part of Opposition Members. I hope that the Government will not spoil this ship for a ha'p'orth of tar. We have waited a long time for the Bill; let us not miss the opportunity to get it right.

9.33 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I thought that it would have been obvious to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) why so many colleagues, myself in particular, were so quiet in the debate. It is because I am still rather hoarse from cheering Gavin Hastings on Saturday. That is the only partisan note that I wish to make to the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* I am very much aware of possible Welsh supporters behind me and in a superior position.

We have had a serious discussion on the Bill tonight, and hon Members have raised a number of intriguing points. The debate has been cross-party, and I want to respond to a number of the points that have been raised.

As has been evident from the contributions to this evening's debate, the Criminal Appeal Bill goes to the heart of the criminal justice process, its effectiveness and integrity, and the checks and balances that any criminal justice system must provide in seeking to bring the guilty to justice while safeguarding the innocent from wrongful conviction. The Bill is firmly based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on criminal justice, and on the detailed consultation that the Government undertook immediately after the royal commission reported. The welcome that the Bill received today from both sides of the House confirms that we can have confidence in it as a sound foundation for our criminal appeals system into the next century.

The independence of the criminal cases review commission which the Bill will create was properly emphasised today. The Bill addresses the matter of independence very carefully, while giving equal care to defining the proper relationship between the commission and other parts of the criminal justice system, as well as defining how the commission is to be accountable to Parliament and the public.

The commission will be independent of Government. My right hon. and learned Friends will relinquish their responsibilities for deciding whether to refer cases to the courts, and those decisions will in future be entirely for the commission. My right hon. and learned Friends will, however, retain their role in relation to recommendations about the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy. Those powers will still be needed in very exceptional cases which, for whatever reason, the commission and the courts cannot deal with in the normal way of things. The prerogative will still have a necessary function in relation to matters which have nothing to do with whether a conviction or sentence was right or wrong: for example, where mercy is justified for exceptional compassionate reasons. Such uses of the prerogative are, however, rare.

The commission's independence will be further guaranteed by the quality of its members and the range of skills and experience that they bring to the task. Once again, the Government's thinking follows closely that of the royal commission. Like the royal commission, we consider that the new body will benefit from having both legally qualified and non-legal members. We also consider that it should have people with a broad knowledge and experience of the criminal justice system, in addition to members from outside that system who will bring entirely fresh perspectives to the work. Thus the new commission will have strength in its diversity.

As is often said, any organisation is only as good as the people in it. Accordingly, we want the best and most suitable people to be members of the commission and comprise its staff. The posts of chairman and members of the commission will be advertised in the press. The job descriptions for those posts will be clearly set out to potential applicants. I do not yet know which newspapers the advertisements will be placed in, but the posts will be widely advertised. I say to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) that the advertisements will not be exclusively in *The Sun*; nor will they be exclusively in *The Guardian*, which may reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland).

Mr. Ashby: If my hon. Friend believes, as he seems to imply, that such independent people are better able to do the job that his Department was doing formerly, might not the same view prevail about mandatory life sentences?

Mr. Maclean: No, the same view would not prevail, and my hon. Friend will not take me down that route tonight.

Candidates applying for the posts will be subject to an appropriate selection procedure to draw up a list of candidates from which the Prime Minister will make his recommendations to Her Majesty the Queen. I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that at least one member of the commission will have knowledge and experience of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland so that the commission is suitably qualified to consider cases arising in that jurisdiction. Of course, the commission will also need some staff with experience of the Northern Ireland legal system. I expect everyone to be appointed on merit and not for any other reason.

The commission will also be independent of the courts. It will not be a court, nor will it be part of the courts structure. There will be no right of appeal as such from the commission's decisions, but those decisions will be subject to the possibility of judicial review, as is proper in cases where liberty and livelihood may be at stake. But the important point is that the commission will be separate from the courts system, with a different composition and

different procedures. Having established its independence, it is important to get the relationship between the commission and the courts absolutely right.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Minister recall that the royal commission recommended that the chairman should not be a judge, past or present? Can the Minister clarify whether his Department accepted that recommendation?

Mr. Maclean: I was going to come to that point later, but the answer is that we have not yet come to a firm conclusion. We are mindful of the views of the royal commission and will take them carefully into account, but we have not yet made a final decision on the background skills and experience of the commission's chairman.

The final decision in any case on whether or not a conviction or sentence should stand will remain with the courts. The commission's function will be to decide whether a case should go to the courts for that decision to be taken. It is clearly of the greatest importance that the commission should not be misinterpreted as being somehow itself a court of appeal acting above, or in parallel with, the courts themselves.

The criteria for references in clause 13 of the Bill have an important part to play in defining that relationship, in a very broad sense, in the legislation. We agree with the royal commission's conclusion that detailed operating criteria are best left to the commission itself. Our own experience tells us that it is impossible to predict all the individual circumstances of the range of cases in which the question of a possible miscarriage of justice may arise.

We agree with the royal commission that the statutory criteria should be broad, although here we have departed in one important respect from its recommendation. The royal commission thought that the only ground for referring a case should be a belief on the part of the new body that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred. In our view, it is necessary to go a little further than that.

There are in essence three elements to the criteria for the reference of convictions in clause 13. First, there must be some new argument or evidence not previously raised at the trial or on appeal. Secondly, there must be a real possibility that the reference will lead to the conviction being quashed. To the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) I say that the phrase "real possibility" is a wide one—the alternative would be to have no real possibility, which would be extraordinary. That is a wide ground for referral. Thirdly, references may be made only outside the normal appeals process. Similar criteria are to be applied in sentence cases.

The requirement that there be some new element for the court to consider is broadly expressed, but it is of great importance. It defines the relationship between the commission and the courts: the one body referring, the other deciding. Unless there is some new element for it to consider, the Court of Appeal or the Crown court would simply be being asked to consider reversing its own previous decision—the point that I was raising with the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). In the absence of anything new, the implication would be that the commission which had referred the case disagreed with the previous finding on appeal. That would place both the commission and the appellate court in a most invidious position.

There would also be no real purpose in such a reference, since the appellate courts cannot be expected to alter their previous judgments unless there is some substantial new point on which they can focus. For both those reasons, it would be unhelpful if the Bill appeared to leave open the possibility that such referrals could be made, thereby confusing potential applicants as to the nature and scope of the commission's responsibilities. The criteria in clause 13 avoid that pitfall, while enabling the commission to refer every possible sort of case in which the courts might come to a fresh view on a further appeal.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) asked me about the test for fresh evidence and grounds of appeal. The discussion paper gave a broad welcome to the royal commission's formula of "is or may be" unsafe, because the Government recognise the need to bring clarity and simplification into such matters. However, the royal commission's formula goes wider than the current practice of the Court of Appeal and was, on examination, found to be uncertain in its effect.

The formula in the Bill provides a simple test, which effectively restates the existing practice of the court, as was wisely noted by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), and I think that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir Ivan Lawrence) concurred. I can assure the House that it does not narrow the grounds for allowing an appeal.

On the test for receiving fresh evidence, the Court of Appeal will receive fresh evidence if it considers that it is capable of belief, rather than, as at present, that it is likely to be credible. That was recommended by the Royal Commission on criminal justice. It provides a lower threshold for the admission of fresh evidence in appeals.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton made some comments in his speech about the word "unsafe"—or the word "unsatisfactory" in the definition of unsafe. The primary test is whether a conviction is unsafe. It is possible that a material irregularity, such as the fact that the police lied to the jury, will cast such a doubt on the safety of the conviction that it is now unsafe. That will depend on the circumstances of the case. The courts have ruled that there is no real difference between "unsafe" and "unsatisfactory". The Royal Commission agreed with that.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton also asked about the proviso. The Bill abolishes the existing proviso that the Court of Appeal need not quash a conviction if it believes that no miscarriage of justice has occurred. All would turn on whether a conviction is unsafe. The Lord Chief Justice and members of the senior judiciary have given the test a great deal of thought, and they believe that the new test restates the existing practice of the Court of Appeal.

Clause 4 lowers the threshold for admission of new evidence to some extent, but I do not believe that it would be right to lower it significantly. Other elements of the existing test are important; for example, there must be a reasonable explanation for the failure to adduce evidence at the original trial. Since the Royal Commission reported, the courts have taken a more flexible view of appeals based on flagrant incompetent advocacy, as the case of Clinton showed, but we need to be careful about permitting cases to return to the Court of Appeal simply because the defence have tried one defence and failed and now wish to try a tactical change of defence manoeuvres.

I am not aware of the article by Sir John Smith QC to which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton referred, but I look forward to reading it before the Committee meets, if it is possible by that date.

[Mr. Maclean]

I shall now discuss the crucial matter of investigations in miscarriage of justice cases, to which the Government have given a great deal of thought, and which was the subject of most comments by most speakers.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend's train of thought, but I wish to ask him a question before he does that.

Perhaps the most significant and important question that has been asked about the investigation process is what happens if the criminal cases review commission digs up some evidence that is not strictly admissible in court, such as hearsay. Will the Court of Appeal say, "We are sorry, but hearsay and is inadmissible and we shall not take it into account in considering whether there has been a miscarriage of justice"? If my hon. Friend canno. deal with that question straight away, perhaps I might receive a reply in due course.

Mr. Maclean: I am happy to give my hon. and learned Friend a more detailed reply in due course, but that could be one of those cases in which the exercise of the royal prerogative might be appropriate.

Other people have commented extensively on the laws of evidence. The laws of evidence are being considered by the Law Commission at present—*[Interruption.]* Yes, by the Law Commission. It is therefore appropriate to consider what it has to say about hearsay and all other aspects of the laws of evidence.

Different opinions have been expressed by hon. Members tonight about whether, how, how far and in what way police officers should be involved in those investigations. The Government recognise that that is a crucial aspect, and we have considered it carefully. However, it was not merely our own experience which told us that a great deal would be lost, and that the new procedures would be considerably weakened, if it were not possible for the commission to have access to the experience and expertise of the police.

The royal commission, after all the evidence that it had seen and heard, and after all the consideration given to those matters, concluded that there was no practical alternative to using police forces in those investigations. Moreover, the need for access to police skills and expertise was endorsed by the majority of those who commented on the point in response to the Government's discussion paper. The paper took care to set out a number of different options for the way in which investigations might be carried out by the new independent body.

Hon. Members emphasised the need for independence in those investigations, and they are right to do so. The proposals in the Bill do not say that the commission will simply hand over its inquiries to a police force and then sit back and hope for the best until the relevant force has reported back. Far from it—the commission will have powers to direct and to supervise any investigation. And "supervise" means just that: a member of the commission will be able to take as active a role in overseeing the inquiries as he or she judges necessary or appropriate in the circumstances of the case.

If it is necessary to accompany an investigating officer when he interviews a witness, a member of the commission will be able to do that. If the commission wants to ask specific questions of a witness, it will be able to require those questions to be asked. If, for some reason, the commission prefers to speak to a witness directly, or the witness prefers to speak directly to the commission, that may occur at the commission's discretion.

All of that seems to provide the measure of independence that the Government are as anxious as hon. Members to see provided. The expertise provided by police officers and the independent contribution made by the directing and supervising members of the commission will be a powerful combination in getting to the root of often complex cases.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) pressed the point about having a corps of investigators in the commission to be used only occasionally. I think that the demand for larger, more complex investigations is likely to fluctuate, and it would be difficult to establish a unit of optimum size. Sometimes the investigators would be under-occupied and on other occasions they would be terribly busy. It would be difficult to get the size of the unit right.

Such a unit would have to be accountable to the exercise of police powers and subject to disciplinary arrangements in respect of its operational duties. Special arrangements would have to be put in place to give the investigators access to training opportunities to keep them in touch and up to date with all elements of police practice, investigative techniques, and so on.

Experience shows that in a significant number of cases the investigation required is very straightforward. It would be far quicker and more cost effective to ask the force concerned to undertake the work. That force often knows the background to the case and where to find the people concerned. We think that it would be less effective to ask a group of officers who are unfamiliar with the case to make the same inquiries.

Another point which I stress to the hon. Member for Upper Bann, which has probably not been picked up, is that the commission's staff will include three or four investigators who will be serving police officers. They will be responsible for directing, planning and supervising the investigations which will be conducted by the external police officers.

Mr. Michael: I am slightly confused by what the Minister has said. Before he gave way, he seemed to be conceding our point that there should be a corps of employees in the commission capable of overseeing the investigations. The general point is surely not that the commission should employ a large number of people, but that there should be a minimum corps to ensure the commission's capacity for independence. Judging from what he has just said, the Minister will surely accept that point.

Mr. Maclean: I am not conceding the hon. Gentleman's point. I think that he recognises what I said a few hours ago to the hon. Member for Upper Bann: we expect the commission's staff to include some serving senior police officers who are able to direct, supervise and control the operations and assess the quality of evidence that the investigating police force has. The prime distinction is that those people will not carry out the investigations themselves. They will not be investigating

officers conducting investigations around the country; they will be employed by the commission to control and direct other police officers.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Mr. Maclean: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's point can wait until consideration of the Bill in Committee, as I wish to reply to many other points. If there is time at the end of my speech, I will allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene again.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker)—I will pay a glowing tribute to him later in my speech—agreed that there should not be a separate independent police investigating body. However, he thought that perhaps the investigating officer should always be from another force. That would remove valuable flexibility and would not allow the best use of resources.

In a case in which no question had arisen about the propriety or effectiveness of the original investigation but one or two potential witnesses needed to be found and interviewed, inquiries by the original force are likely to be quicker and less cumbersome than bringing in an officer from an outside force on every occasion. The commission has the power to require an outside force to investigate wherever it judges such action to be necessary. We would like to keep the flexibility in cases—perhaps the vast bulk of them—where it will be sensible to use the original force.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley has more experience than most people have of the difficult and complex issues raised by miscarriage of justice cases, and he has great experience of the hard decisions that have to be taken. I welcomed his eloquent remarks, and was glad to hear him praise the patient, able and conscientious work done over the years. I am delighted that he paid glowing tribute to the C3 division of the Home Office, whose members have been unsung heroes for years, for all their hard background work in dealing with difficult miscarriage of justice cases.

The Bill is of the utmost importance in strengthening the procedures by which potential miscarriages of justice may be swiftly identified and corrected. Like any other system or organisation, the criminal justice system depends on the people who work in it. The processes of investigation, trial and appeal are made up of a complex interaction of human decisions. Like any system that is operated by human beings—as my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) said—things will sometimes go humanly wrong.

The House recognises that the consequences of such mistakes for an innocent person are terrible and profound. Moreover, the conviction of an innocent person means that someone else has escaped punishment—and possibly that a dangerous person may still be at large. Our duty to individual citizens and to the public in general is to ensure that all appropriate safeguards are placed along the way, so that neither mischief nor lack of vigilance prevents the conviction of the guilty and the acquittal of the innocent. I pay tribute again to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley for establishing the royal commission, and for being the progenitor of the excellent Bill that is before the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and other hon. Members asked about legal aid. Legal aid will continue to be made available through the green form scheme, to assist applicants to make representations to the commission. The commission's procedures will be investigative, so no additional form of legal aid will be necessary. Once a case has been referred to the courts, the appellant may apply for legal aid for the appeal. As to judicial review of commission decisions, those challenging a judicial review might get civil legal aid, depending on their individual circumstances.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann asked about the relationship between the Police Complaints Authority and the commission. I recognise the potential for overlap, which will require co-operation between both bodies. Under present arrangements, where such an overlap occurs it results in a single investigation under the PCA's supervision. Similar administrative arrangements will be needed when the commission takes over the Secretary of State's powers. The scope of the commission's inquiries may go wider than the PCA.

I was asked about the situation in Scotland. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has appointed a committee to examine possible miscarriages of justice there and what should be the response of the Scottish Office, and I understand that that committee is due to report in 1996.

As to the laws of evidence, I intimated that the Law Commission is examining that aspect. I was also asked whether the commission would be able to obtain transcripts of certain cases. The answer is yes, the commission can get transcripts; it can get anything it likes, within its generous £4.4 million budget.

Our criminal justice system has rightly been the envy of the world. If it is to remain so, we must be continually developing and refining it, acknowledging and learning the lessons of what has worked well and what has gone wrong. The Bill is the result of much thinking and much experience, not only in Government but outside, especially on the part of the royal commission. I believe that its contribution to the quality of our system of justice will be both lasting and substantial. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

CRIMINAL APPEAL BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Criminal Appeal Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure of the Secretary of State incurred in connection with the Criminal Cases Review Commission; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided; and

(2) any payments into the Consolidated Fund.

To be decided forthwith, pursuant to Order [19th December].—[*Mr. Conway.*]

Question agreed to.

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 131(2)(Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [22nd February] of the Liaison Committee.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

Question agreed to.

Madam Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on motions Nos. 4 to 8.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5)(Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

Northern Ireland

That the draft Children's Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.

That the draft Wildlife (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

Urban Development

That the Leeds Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1995, dated 6th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Enforcement of External Orders) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees),

Relations with Russia

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7988/94, relating to a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement with the Russian Federation, and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 27th January 1995, relating to an Interim Agreement with the Russian Federation; and recognises that these Agreements will offer substantial encouragement to the process of reform in the Russian Federation through enhanced political and economic co-operation with the European Union.

Question agreed to.

Protection of Workers

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of European Document No. 7484/93, relating to the posting of workers; and endorses the Government's view that the present text of the draft Directive is bureaucratic, anti-competitive and protectionist in nature, and that it would erect barriers to a free market and damage the effective operation of the Single Market.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

The House divided: Ayes 152, Noes 56.

Division No. 95] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Booth, Hartley
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Michael
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray

Whittingdale, John	Wood, Timothy
Widdecombe, Ann	
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*	**Mr. Liam Fox and**
Wolfson, Mark	**Mr. David Willetts.**

NOES

Alton, David	Hardy, Peter
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Harvey, Nick
Austin-Walker, John	Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Barnes, Harry	Hutton, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J	Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Betts, Clive	Khabra, Piara S
Burden, Richard	McCartney, Ian
Cabom, Richard	McFall, John
Callaghan, Jim	McMaster, Gordon
Campbell-Savours, D N	Meale, Alan
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*	Michael, Alun
Chisholm, Malcolm	Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Clapham, Michael	Morgan, Rhodri
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*	Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Connarty, Michael	Mullin, Chris
Corbyn, Jeremy	O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Cox, Tom	Oiner, Bill
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*	Pike, Peter L
Davis, Cynog	Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Dewar, Donald	Roche, Mrs Barbara
Dixon, Don	Skinner, Dennis
Donohoe, Brian H	Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Eastham, Ken	Straw, Jack
Enright, Derek	Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Etherington, Bill	Tyler, Paul
Flynn, Paul	Wallace, James
Fyfe, Maria	
Gerrard, Neil	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Godman, Dr Norman A	**Ms Jean Corston and**
Gunnell, John	**Mr. Andrew MacKinlay.**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Document No. 7484/93, relating to the posting of workers; and endorses the Government's view that the present text of the draft Directive is bureaucratic, anti-competitive and protectionist in nature, and that it would erect barriers to a free market and damage the effective operation of the Single Market.

DEFENCE

Ordered,

That Mr. Robert Key be added to the Defence Committee.—*[Mr. Dixon, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Madam Speaker: I am pleased to hear the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) move the motion. I hear that there are only a couple of hours to go before it is the end of his birthday. It is very nice to hear the hon. Gentleman, and I wish him a happy birthday.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am not in my usual place, because I think it useful for my hon. Friend the Minister and me to be able to see each other in an uncrowded Chamber.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for being present to answer the debate. I realise full well that he has an instinctive sympathy with many of the things that I say, whatever his departmental brief causes him to say in practice, so nothing that I say is in any way a personal criticism of himself.

In this short debate, I shall raise two closely related matters: first, the recent report of the ombudsman on the Department of Transport's handling of the blight that has been caused by the channel tunnel rail link; and secondly, the context in which that report arose.

Three Kent Members of Parliament submitted specimen cases to the ombudsman of constituents who had suffered grievous hardship as a result of the proposal to build the link. As a result, the ombudsman found that the Department of Transport had been guilty of maladministration, in that it had failed to consider the possible need to provide redress for persons suffering extreme or exceptional hardship, who were not covered by the various compensation schemes.

In rejecting the report—for only the second time in the ombudsman's history—the Department argues that the project is not exceptional, that it never fell into limbo, and that it is impossible to devise a scheme that would be able to define "exceptional" in a way in which would limit the cost to acceptable levels.

Throughout Sir Patrick Brown's evidence to the Committee, he rightly emphasised that his job was to carry out ministerial policy, and whenever it helped him to do so, he quoted Ministers. Yet, when faced with a statement from his Secretary of State that declared:

> "The rail link is . . . not just another investment project and we shall be ridiculed if we appear to treat it in that way. It has become a symbol, both at home and abroad, of our whole approach to Europe and our ability to look beyond the short-term",

he lightly dismisses the remark as merely "appropriate rhetoric".

What is more, he argues that, since all the cases referred to the ombudsman were examples of what he calls "generalised blight", it would have been impossible to work out a scheme to compensate any of them without putting the Department into an untenable position. Well, he is wrong on several counts.

First, both British Rail and Union Railways have had schemes to compensate in exceptional cases. Since the former was ultimately answerable to the Government as a nationalised industry, and the latter was set up as a wholly owned subsidiary of British Rail, that seems quite a good pair of precedents.

Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), who is graciously in his place tonight, pointed out to the Select Committee—in a letter that he was kind enough to copy to me—there are a number of cases which clearly are

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

examples of specific blight, and despite the efforts of my right hon. Friend, the Department has made no attempt to help them.

Thirdly, the Department claims that the project never went into limbo, because efforts continued to find a way to advance it even when every criterion against which it was supposedly being measured had failed to be met.

What Government Departments must learn is that the public are neither stupid nor ill-informed. They had been told time and again that the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 prohibited any public subsidy to the line. They were told by the noble Lord Parkinson that the attempt to find a private sector partner had not succeeded, and they were entitled to assume that the project would not proceed.

I do not believe that any of them could have foreseen that, by setting up a nominally private company, albeit as a wholly owned subsidiary as British Rail, the Government would be able to claim that they were no longer breaching the Channel Tunnel Act if they poured subsidy into the project. Not even my sophisticated constituents could have predicted that particular sleight of hand. It was reasonable, therefore, to assume that the project would not proceed.

I believe that the ombudsman is right to describe the frantic but secret attempts of the Department to find ways of getting around the law as "limbo". I therefore believe that the Department should accept the report and offer our constituents, one of whom, in my case, has been unable to move his wife, who suffers from a progressive disease, to a more suitable house, at least a chance that they may be considered for compensation.

I turn now to the wider context. In recent months, a number of women have received considerable sums of money in compensation from the Government for having been sacked from the armed services for becoming pregnant. The sackings may subsequently have been deemed to infringe their rights, but nobody can pretend that at the time they joined up they had no idea of the possible consequences of their chosen course of action, because at the time the rules of the various services were quite clear.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which was set up in 1964, had by the end of March 1993 already paid out £909,446,123 for injuries sustained by citizens at the hands of criminals even if, according to its annual report,

"sometimes they only sustain cuts, bruises or sprains."

Those are two examples from a growing number in which the taxpayer is required to meet part of the cost of failures by public services to match the expectations of the citizen.

However, even as the Government accept more responsibility for helping their citizens to meet the unpredictable mischances that they encounter in their dealings with Government agencies or, in the case of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, their fellow citizens, there is a gross and indefensible gap in the Government's response.

At any time, the Department of Transport can decide to design a major infrastructure project and, once it has allowed its intention to become known, it plunges into ruin a large number of people who could not have known that the plan was going to be made, may even have good reasons for supposing that it would not come to pass, and can take no steps to minimise their loss.

As the permanent secretary to the Department of Transport made plain in his response to the ombudsman's report and in his evidence to the Select Committee, there is no need for the Government even to be certain that they have the funds to build a scheme on which they are working until after the necessary legislation has been passed. Last week, Sir Patrick told the Select Committee:

"It is inevitable that there will be a planning phase, followed by a public inquiry or a Bill in Parliament and then a further period of detailed design and contracts before funding is committed. That is the way our system works."

We know from recent experience that, even at that stage, the Government can decide either not to proceed at all or radically to alter a scheme. Oxleas wood, the project for which was recently completely changed, has been debated since 1979. The result of all that is that, for anything up to 25 years on any one project, hundreds of households can be robbed by the state with no hope of any redress.

I take as an example the village of Boxley in my constituency. There lives Mr. Gardiner in a house which was once worth more than £400,000. In a recent valuation, it was reckoned that the fall in property prices had sliced some £100,000 off that. That is fair enough: the property market has always risen and fallen. But what illustrates my point is that Mr. Gardiner had borrowed against his property to assist his business, which once had a turnover of more than £2 million and employed 12 people.

Then came the channel tunnel rail link, and the bank revalued his property. Its valuer decided that, because of the proximity of the link, the house could not be sold, valued it at nil, and the business collapsed. That is by no means an isolated example.

I shall take another village—Harrietsham, in which a young couple wanted to sell their starter home because their family was being born. They could not find a buyer except at such a grossly exploitative price that they would have been ruined and their debt to the mortgage company could never have been repaid.

Those are but two of hundreds of such tales. It is absurd to ask the owners to stay on in their homes, however unsuitable, until the project is completed.

The average householder stays some five or six years in his home before moving on. As Sir Patrick pointed out as part of his argument that there is nothing exceptional about the link, many roads projects take much longer than the projected 16 years of the link. As a result, thousands of families are expected to stay in their homes for four or five times the average length, regardless of their circumstances, or lose almost all the value of their most important, often their only, asset.

I think that the picture is an appalling one. A monopoly entrepreneur—the Government—arbitrarily decides to embark on a project that they may never even bring to fruition and thereby rob hundreds of their citizens with no intention of helping them to overcome their loss. Let them be mugged in the street and the taxpayer compensates them; let them be mugged in their own homes by the Government and they can whistle for help, for it will not come. The position is gross and unsustainable, and must be changed.

Sir Patrick told the Select Committee of his advice to Ministers on any possible change in the policy towards what he called generalised blight—which simply means

specific blight for the individual, but blight that is outside the scope of the present statutory scheme. It does not mean that the misery is generalised: it is all too specific, family by family, home by home. He said that it would not represent value for money. That phrase, in the context of human misery, strikes a chill to the heart.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is concerned about the matter; we have discussed it. I want him to turn that concern into a public consultation on how best we can mitigate this great and widespread scandal.

Perhaps we should have a system where the valuer puts a price on a property and, if it has to be sold at a loss because of public works, part of the difference is made up. That would at least relieve the Department from being a massive property owner, which it is very reluctantly. Perhaps there should be established some sort of buyer of last resort, as I have previously suggested to the Government. Perhaps each project, as it is set up, should set up some form of mutual insurance to which any household in danger of blight might subscribe at the start of the scheme.

I do not know how to resolve this difficult problem, but what I am quite clear about is that it will not do for the Department merely to say, "Because it is too difficult, we shall do nothing." I urge my hon. Friend to make the effort. That would be value for money.

10.27 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) for bringing this important subject to the attention of the House again.

The special report by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration on the channel tunnel rail link, which was published on 9 February, finds that there was maladministration by my Department. Exceptionally, the Department has not felt able to accept the commissioner's findings, and has therefore not offered redress. The case is a very unusual one, and the commissioner himself has recognised that by publishing the Department's response to the findings as an appendix to his report.

I should emphasise at this point that the response is a considered response by the Government, which was prepared after extensive discussion of the issues over a period of months, both with the commissioner and between Ministers. Since the report's publication, as my hon. Friend has explained, the permanent secretary to the Department of Transport, Sir Patrick Brown, has given evidence—on 1 March—to the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), the Chairman of the Select Committee, in his place.

The Select Committee will make its own report to the House, and in advance of that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the detail of the commissioner's findings or on any of the five specimen cases he considered. I can speak more generally, however, about past and present property purchase and compensation arrangements for the channel tunnel rail link project, and about the wider policy context in which they have been applied.

The commissioner's report finds maladministration from June 1990 to April 1994, when the route for the final section of the rail link was determined. The blight caused by the rail link in that period is what is described as generalised blight. To be absolutely clear about our terms, that is the blight that may arise in the early stages of a project while options are being examined and worked up, and while consultation is taking place. It can arise even earlier, when a feasibility study is being undertaken to decide whether a project should be pursued.

Generalised blight ceases at the point at which a project becomes sufficiently well defined for the likely land requirements to be identified on a plan and safeguarded from development. At that stage, statutory or equivalent blight provisions are triggered.

The period of generalised blight is undoubtedly one of uncertainty and great anxiety for property owners. Unfortunately, with controversial major proposals such as a possible new motorway or power station, that period of uncertainty can be prolonged. It is incumbent on us to try to ensure that it is not prolonged any more than is necessary, but it can be prolonged.

Nonetheless, it has been the policy of successive Governments that there should be no remedy for generalised blight. Indeed, until 1991, statutory remedies for blight were available only to people whose property was likely to be required for the scheme.

Mr. Rowe: What description would my hon. Friend give to the blight that, in his terms, is neither generalised nor statutory, but is very real? Such blight affects whole villages and communities, where it is clear that people will not buy a house because the line is close enough for them to think that it would be difficult for them to buy and sell the house on; at the same time, however, it is not susceptible to any form of compensation. How would my hon. Friend describe that kind of blight?

Mr. Watts: I am not sure that a suitable term comes readily to mind—

Mr. Rowe: Misery.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend has made his own suggestion. It is important that we recognise characteristics of generalised blight, and why successive Governments have not chosen to provide a remedy in respect of such blight.

Public authorities had certain additional discretionary powers to acquire land, but those were limited in scope. Before 1991, there were no general powers to buy homes that were simply blighted by proximity to proposed works.

Following a policy review, a consultation paper in 1989 proposed the introduction of new discretionary powers to allow the promoters of major public projects to deal with "blight by proximity". In the consultation paper, the proposal was made

"in recognition of the length of the planning phase of many major development projects during which it may be as difficult as during later phases to sell a property which is likely to be substantially affected and devalued by the construction of the project or the prospect of its use."

That proposal was taken forward, and subsequently endorsed by Parliament in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Naturally, there were people who argued in response to the consultation paper and during the passage of the Bill that the provisions did not go far enough.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Does not my hon. Friend agree that, under the powers in section 62 of the Act to which he has referred, the Department of Transport

[Sir John Stanley]

is operating with a hardship scheme? That being the case, why is the Department so resistant to having a hardship scheme in the context of the channel tunnel rail link?

Mr. Watts: Union Railways is operating a hardship scheme. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) has raised this matter in debate. I know that, in his view, the scheme that operates is far too limited. He also argues that it is not equivalent to the schemes that are operated on the highways side of the Department. There is a voluntary scheme being operated by Union Railways, because until the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill has completed its passage through the House and the other place, there is no statutory basis for compensation in relation to that scheme.

The proposal was taken forward and endorsed by Parliament in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling and a number of my hon. Friends argued that its provisions did not go far enough. Understandably, the very real problems being experienced by people whose property was blighted by the channel tunnel rail link were among the cases cited in support of this argument, although many other examples were also quoted. None the less, Parliament accepted that the improvements proposed by the Government struck the right balance, and proposals for further measures were rejected.

There are sound reasons why the Government did not consider it appropriate to go further. This is not simply a question of cost, although the Government must, of course, have regard to the fact that property and compensation costs are a charge on the project, and to the fact that a substantial increase in costs could mean that highly desirable projects would have to be deferred or could be made uneconomic.

Property purchase schemes are a mixed blessing for people in the area affected. Large-scale property purchase schemes severely distort the local property market, especially when the general property market is weak and, as experience of British Rail's early schemes showed, blight snowballs as the nature of the community changes, so more people move away. It takes many years for an area to recover from these effects.

If, for example, I accepted that the house of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent was blighted, that would almost automatically blight his neighbour's house. That is one of the fundamental objections to allowing the effect of such schemes to be too widespread.

The problems are difficult enough once a project has been defined sufficiently for safeguarding to take place. In the absence of a defined scheme, it is people's perception and fears of the effects of a possible project which give rise to generalised blight, often over a very wide area. It is only when there is a defined scheme that proper objective measurements, such as noise levels, can be applied and mitigating measures can be applied. This is the basis of our policy, and this is why there is no remedy for generalised blight.

Some hon. Members have argued, as indeed the commissioner has done in his report, that the Government could and should have introduced not a widespread remedy for generalised blight, but a more narrowly based scheme to deal with exceptional cases. However, it was the judgment of the Government at the time, and it remains the judgment of the Government now, that such a scheme would not have been appropriate.

The Government believe that, as a matter of policy, we should adopt an even-handed and consistent approach, both between individual cases and between projects.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I have listened carefully to the Minister. I put a straightforward question to him. If he was one of the people blighted, as Conservative Members have described, what would be his reaction, and what would he say to the Secretary of State for Transport?

Mr. Watts: I suspect that, as a property owner, I would react in much the same way as all property owners react if they find that the value of their property is being affected adversely. It is, however, not my personal judgment that I have to bring to bear in addressing this issue, but rather broader issues of public policy.

The Government believe that we should adopt an even-handed and consistent approach between individual cases and between projects. Pepper-potting of purchases is extremely dangerous, because every purchase blights all the neighbouring or equivalent properties. It is extremely difficult to define cases narrowly. I know this all too well from my own ministerial postbag, and from the variety of compassionate cases which hon. Members bring to my attention from time to time on major infrastructure projects throughout the country.

It is for those reasons that the Government concluded that the right solution was to press on as quickly as possible with the development of a robust project that could be taken forward so that blight could be ended.

Since the route was defined in 1994, Union Railways has been operating a voluntary purchase scheme, whereby qualifying owners of property to be compulsorily purchased can request Union Railways to purchase now on terms equivalent to compulsory purchase terms. Union Railways also operates a discretionary purchase scheme for properties outside the safeguarded zone, on terms broadly comparable—although I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling does not accept that the comparison is as close as it should be—to the scheme operated by the Highways Agency under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

I know that a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and Opposition Members, feel that those arrangements do not go wide enough. They are currently being reviewed in the light of the Court of Appeal judgment in the Owen case, and I shall announce the outcome of that review as soon as possible.

I look forward to seeing the report of the Select Committee for the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration on the rail link case. I hope the House will find my explanation of current policy and arrangements helpful when it considers the Committee's report and will understand why it is not appropriate for me to comment further and in detail at this stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 7 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Long-term Unemployed

1. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of how the long-term unemployed are affected by Government policies.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): The Government have developed a range of measures to help the long-term unemployed back into work. The proportion of those who are long-term unemployed is markedly lower in Britain than the EC average.

Mr. Streeter: In view of the rapid fall in unemployment, is it not the case that the prospects of the long-term unemployed obtaining work are now better than they have been for many years? Does my right hon. Friend agree that to introduce now the job destruction programme of the social chapter and a national minimum wage would be for those who are genuinely seeking work nothing but a massive kick in the teeth?

Mr. Portillo: The aspiration of those who developed the social chapter was to create a social dimension to the European Community. It was a massive raft of legislation under qualified majority voting which would have loaded costs on employers and destroyed jobs. I make it clear to my hon. Friend that there will be no end to the opt-out negotiated by this Government. The Labour party would sell out anything at all in its craven attitude to Brussels.

Mr. Soley: Is it the intention of the Secretary of State to achieve full employment?

Mr. Portillo: It is my intention that the maximum number of people should be able to participate in work. That means developing a flexible labour market and it means helping people with practical measures from Government. It means establishing policies that enable the country and the economy to grow. It means establishing policies to encourage people to invest in this country and to create job opportunities. It means avoiding the Labour party's technique of trying to mislead the unemployed into believing that a Government can spend their way out of unemployment.

Mr. Merchant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a minimum wage is one of the greatest threats to measures to curb and to overcome long-term unemployment? Does he agree that a minimum wage would not just get in the way of job creation, but would result in the loss of many valuable jobs that exist today?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, it is a complete fallacy to believe that a minimum wage has anything to do with the reduction of poverty. Many people who work on low wages are second or third earners in their households. Those are the sort of jobs that could easily be destroyed by the introduction of a minimum wage, with the result that families who enjoyed the benefit of extra incomes would be made poorer. As the trade unions insist on the maintenance of differentials, the bulk of the resources that would go into establishing a minimum wage would benefit people who were better off and not the people at the bottom.

Mr. Chidgey: Is the Secretary of State aware that outcomes show that training for work policies are failing the long-term unemployed, with only one in 10 gaining full-time employment after leaving such schemes? Does he accept that instead of slashing training budgets by more than £125 million, the money should be redirected and targeted at long-term unemployment which remains an unacceptably and disproportionately high part of the unemployment total?

Mr. Portillo: The training for work budget is targeted at the long-term unemployed, who are precisely the people who can qualify for training for work. The hon. Gentleman is on to quite a good point in saying that not enough people are getting jobs or other what we call positive outcomes at the end of their training—in other words, going into other opportunities that are valuable to them. I am determined that that proportion shall rise and I shall get the proportion of those who achieve a positive outcome from their training of one sort or another up to 50 per cent. I believe that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that development.

Mr. Couchman: How many of the long-term unemployed owe their predicament to employment consultancies that give advice on how to sack people, such as the JSB Group which is headed by the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment?

Mr. Portillo: I am not able to give the figure. Every hon. Member is the guardian of his own conscience and, certainly, people should be in the business of removing any beams from their own eyes before they search for motes elsewhere.

Mr. Barron: If one half of the long-term unemployed on training for work courses are not getting any qualifications at all and more than half the men who come off those schemes go back on the dole, as do a third of women, how can the Government justify cutting the training budget by 20 per cent. and slashing 55,000 chances for the long-term unemployed to go on to a scheme?

Mr. Portillo: Although the hon. Gentleman asked the question in all innocence, he knows perfectly well that the objective of our training for work reforms is precisely to ensure that the training is not only for training's sake, but to get people into jobs and into other opportunities of value. I shall increase the proportion of people who get

those positive outcomes. I shall increase the numbers of people who get those positive outcomes. If the hon. Gentleman is attacking that, let him stand up and say so.

Ms Short: By magic?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady says that because she has no understanding of improving efficiency or value for money. That, if I may say so, is what distinguishes the Labour party from the Conservative party.

Departmental Employees

2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are in (a) his Department and (b) the Employment Service agency; what the figures were two years ago; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): There are 55,693 staff in the Employment Department group, of whom 44,737 work in the Employment Service agency. Two years ago, there were 61,897 staff in the Department, of whom 47,652 worked in the Employment Service agency.

Mr. Greenway: On International Women's Day, would my hon. Friend join me in welcoming an end to discrimination against women in employment? May I also be assured that there will be no discrimination against men in employment? From the figure that she has kindly supplied, is it not clear that lower unemployment means that fewer staff are needed by her Department and that everyone saves because those people go to other jobs?

Miss Widdecombe: Fewer staff are needed because, of course, there has been a fall in unemployment, which should be welcomed by all parties. I can confirm what my hon. Friend says. We welcome moves which reduce discrimination against women and we are committed to eliminating discrimination against women, but, of course, that should not involve, in turn, discriminating against men.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister agree that the greatest discrimination is against people with disabilities? Will she tell us, therefore, how many disabled people are employed in the Department and in the Employment Service agency?

Miss Widdecombe: The number of registered disabled people in the Department of Employment at 1 July 1994 amounted to 2 per cent.

Coal Mining Areas

3. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he intends to take to improve employment prospects in former coal mining areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): As a result of the Government's sound economic policies and a flexible deregulated labour market, as well as the £200 million special measures package, unemployment is falling in Barnsley and most other former mining areas as it is in the rest of the country.

Mr. Illsley: Is the Minister aware that a recent survey carried out in former mining areas, as he refers to them, particularly in Barnsley, showed that 44 per cent. of miners who were made redundant in 1992 were still unemployed, that 9 per cent. were in training and that, overall, something like 89 per cent. of those miners were worse off, especially those who had taken jobs which paid around £65 a week less than they previously earned in the mining industry? That is a consequence of this Government's policy towards the coal mining industry and towards employment. Those 44 per cent. of people and 30 per cent. of males who are economically inactive in former coal mining areas are the positive outcomes of Government policy. Those are the positive outcomes of the Department of Employment. What will the Government do to restore employment in those areas?

Mr. Paice: Any change in the economic structure of any locality obviously creates disruption. As has happened in so many parts of the country over many centuries, it takes time for local communities to adapt to new circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the survey and work done by Sheffield Hallam university on the subject—

Mr. Illsley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Paice: In that case, the answer to his question is no, I do not know anything about the study to which he has just referred. If he would draw it to my attention, I am sure that I would discover that it is based on just as much flawed information as the survey carried out at Sheffield Hallam university.

Mr. Devlin: Has my hon. Friend seen the answer to a parliamentary question that I tabled last week, which shows that in five years the previous Labour Government closed three times as many pits in the northern region as the Conservatives have closed since 1979? In the light of that, is it not a bit rich of Opposition Members to make a great fuss about this Government's record on the coal mines when the Labour party's record is far worse?

Mr. Paice: The House is no stranger to the hypocrisy that we often hear from the Opposition Benches. As my hon. Friend reminds us, we are well aware that previous Labour Governments closed 313 pits in total and lost 205,000 jobs—far more than have been lost in recent years. British Coal now has a new future in the private sector. Pits are being reopened and people can look forward to greater job security.

Mr. McCartney: Those of us who live in mining communities need no lessons from Conservative Members. Between September 1992 and December 1994, 34,000 miners lost their jobs as a result of the actions of this Government. That amounted to 83 per cent. of British Coal's work force. Labour local authorities have joined British Coal Enterprise Ltd. to try to regain the ground lost as a result of the huge job losses. However, even now the Government are trying to close British Coal Enterprise. What will the Minister do to protect the continuation of British Coal Enterprise and its activities in mining communities? The closure of British Coal Enterprise will see the loss of 400 more jobs while thousands of miners are still on the dole.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman forgot to mention the pits that have been reopened since they went into the private sector. He knows as well as I do that the funding of British Coal Enterprise is guaranteed until March 1996 and that its future beyond that is a matter for my right

hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, who is obviously extremely concerned that the good works of British Coal Enterprise are not lost.

Labour Statistics

4. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those major countries in the European Union where the level of unemployment is on a clear downward trend.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): The United Kingdom is the only major EC country where unemployment has continuously fallen over the last six months, using the internationally recognised and comparable International Labour Organisation figures.

Mr. Martin: Can my hon. Friend confirm that, despite the Labour party's constant bleating about fiddling the figures, unemployment—including youth unemployment—is falling in this country as a result of policies that recognise that businesses best create jobs as a result of low rates and low taxation and without Labour encouraging envy and over-regulation?

Mr. Oppenheim: Perhaps uncharacteristically, I am on the side of the Trades Union Congress on this one. The figures that I have quoted are the international standard ILO figures, which the TUC said were wholly reliable. Those figures show that unemployment in the UK is falling faster than in the rest of Europe and that employment in the UK is rising faster than in the rest of Europe. The ILO figures, which the TUC supports, show that the unemployment total in Britain is 2.4 million, which is almost exactly the same level as the claimant count which the Opposition say is fiddled. How can they both show the same totals when one is apparently fiddled, but the other is not?

Mr. Hardy: Would the Minister care to tell the House of any areas in Europe where the problem of unemployment is more intense than it is in areas like the Dearne valley and certain other coalfield counties? Whatever the Government may say about the statistics, can the Minister provide evidence that our position is better than that of anywhere else?

Mr. Oppenheim: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman considers several countries within the European Community, not least Spain where youth unemployment is three times the UK level and overall unemployment is twice the UK level. It is no coincidence that Spain has a Socialist Government and one of the most regulated economies in Europe. As a result of that regulation, whereas Britain has only 5 per cent. casual workers, Spain has 33 per cent. casual workers because employers there cannot afford to employ people within the regulated system. Is that what the hon. Gentleman wants for Britain?

Flexible Labour Market

5. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what impact the Government's flexible labour market policy has had on the ability of the Employment Service to place people into jobs over the last year.

Miss Widdecombe: Progress in achieving a flexible labour market means that a diverse range of job opportunities is increasingly available. That is good news for unemployed people, who are more easily assisted into finding work by the Employment Service, which placed 1.8 million people into jobs last year, an increase of 16 per cent. over the previous year.

Miss Nicholson: Does my hon. Friend agree that considerably more people are in employment in the United Kingdom than in other member nations of the European Union? If she agrees with that point, does she believe that our more flexible regulations contribute massively to that excellent result?

Miss Widdecombe: I can indeed confirm that we have a higher participation rate than other major EU countries and that our excellent employment position is owing to our flexible policies—policies which have caused unemployment to fall steadily for two years, which give us among the highest take-home rates of pay and lower than average youth unemployment, which created 220,000 full-time and 83,000 part-time jobs last year, and which put nearly 2 million people into work. We have the second highest percentage of female participation and among the highest number of part-time jobs.

Ms Short: Is the Minister aware that fewer hours are now worked in the British economy than were worked in 1979, that women in Britain have a bigger gender pay gap than women in any other European Union country, and that the percentage of men in employment, which was 93 per cent. in 1971, is now 75 per cent? Does she agree that the Government's version of flexibility means insecure, low-paid employment for increasing numbers of British families?

Hon. Members: Over-rehearsed.

Miss Widdecombe: Not only over-rehearsed, but largely inaccurate.

As for the pay gap, perhaps the hon. Lady would like to welcome the fact that the gap between women's and men's pay is now narrower than ever. It is decidedly narrower than it was when the hon. Lady's party was in power. Perhaps, when the hon. Lady deplores levels of work, she will welcome, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said, our high participation rates compared with those of our European neighbours. As the hon. Lady is talking about women, will she welcome the fact that this is the only country with a lower female than male unemployment rate?

Industrial Relations

6. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the long-term improvement of industrial relations.

Mr. Portillo: I have no current plans for such a meeting, but that is no reason for us to neglect the fact that the number of days lost in strikes last year was the lowest since records began in 1891.

Sir David Knox: Although there has been a great improvement in industrial relations in recent years, does my right hon. Friend agree that, in that sphere as in all others, there is no room for complacency? Does he agree further that employee participation plays an important part

in the consolidation of that improvement in industrial relations? Will my right hon. Friend discuss that point when he next meets the Confederation of British Industry?

Mr. Portillo: That might be a good subject for discussion with the CBI. I agree with my hon. Friend that consultation with employees is a hallmark of good employers. The important point is that that should be a matter for employers and employees; it should not be imposed upon them either by Governments or by Brussels. It is extraordinary to see Labour Members wishing to sign up to things like the works councils directive, which would impose a wholly inflexible, wholly rigid superstructure on companies, and thus make them less able to respond to the marketplace. I do not believe that my hon. Friend would want anything like that.

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State recognise that there is considerable concern among the work forces of privatised utilities, who see their job opportunities slashed by managements who give themselves massive pay awards? Is that not criminal? Should not the Government take action to stop it now?

Mr. Portillo: I have noticed that customers of the former nationalised industries used to worry day to day and year to year about their security of supply, but that is no longer the case. Whereas in the past, people were afraid that there would be strikes in the gas or electricity industries, on the airlines or in the coach companies—all the important services that were provided to the public—they no longer fear such strikes, because privatisation has improved industrial relations in those essential services. We shall continue that policy in some of the other essential services. Doubtless, by that means, we shall restore industrial peace in those sectors, too.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reason why there are only 1 per cent. as many strikes now as there were in 1979 is that people on both sides of industry realise that the only beneficiaries from strikes are our foreign competitors? In the increasing climate of co-operation rather than confrontation, is it not appropriate to say that works councils imposed upon industry either by Brussels or, potentially, by the Labour party are a total and absolute irrelevance and a waste of time?

Mr. Portillo: It is worth dwelling for a moment on the figure given by my hon. Friend that there are 100 times fewer strikes now than there were in 1979. In January 1979, there were 10 times as many days lost to strikes as in the whole of 1994. The Labour party had a miserable record.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend was right to say that that is now accepted by both sides of industry. Bill Morris recently said that he wished to repeal a dozen pieces of Tory legislation on industrial relations.

Mrs. Helen Jackson *indicated assent.*

Mr. Portillo: There have been only a dozen pieces of legislation. I see the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) nodding. Perhaps she could tell us whether the Labour party's policy is to repeal all of the pieces of legislation which have brought peace to British industry.

Ms Harman: Does the Secretary of State think that it will improve industrial relations—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must calm down. Members on both sides are much to noisy.

Ms Harman: Does the Secretary of State think that it will improve industrial relations at British Gas that its chairman Cedric Brown has had a pay increase which takes his pay up to £475,000? Does the Secretary of State agree with the Prime Minister that such increases are distasteful and that legislative action may be necessary to prevent them, or does the right hon. Gentleman stand by what he said only last week, that there should be no Government intervention in those matters?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady ought to quote the Prime Minister accurately, as she ought to quote me accurately. That is the courtesy that she owes to every Member of the House. If the hon. Lady can make her case only by misquoting people, we must draw the conclusion that she does not have a case at all.

Let me tell the hon. Lady about British Gas. When British Gas was nationalised, the Opposition told us not to privatise it. We were told that the service was as good as it could be, and that prices were as low as they could be. Since then, the service has been improved, the number of customers has increased and prices have been slashed in real terms. The company has improved its efficiency so much that it is able to make profits.

The hon. Lady—who has been wrong year after year and whose every premise has been proved wrong—now complains that people who knew better than she and who could manage better than she are being rewarded. She wants to unleash the politics of envy, but I tell her that those politics will gobble up her and her party.

Young People

7. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people in the United Kingdom have either education or training places; and what were the figures in 1979.

Mr. Paice: The answer is 1.1 million in spring 1994. This is 84 per cent. of all 16 and 17-year-olds, which compares with 54 per cent. in 1984, the first year for which information is available.

Mr. Evans: Opposition Members have a sad obsession with job-destroying policies such as the social chapter, the minimum wage and adding social costs on to employers. Are not the policies which we have adopted—including training and education, the national curriculum, general national vocational qualifications, national vocational qualifications, youth credits, the modern apprenticeship scheme, the accelerated apprenticeship scheme and the schemes adopted by training and enterprise councils—far better? Are not those policies the best way of giving hope and opportunity to our young people for the future?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right. The Government have put in place a range of measures so that all our young people—whatever their background or ability—can choose the best way to maximise their talents and to drive

forward Britain's economic recovery and skills for the future. Nearly all of the changes have been opposed by the Labour party, which has begrudgingly come round to accept them, because it knows that what we are doing is right in the long term for our country.

Mr. Barry Jones: How many apprenticeships exist today in Britain?

Mr. Paice: Apprenticeships at present are a matter for individual industries. There is no national apprenticeship scheme for which records could be kept. The modern apprenticeships scheme that the Government are launching is presently in prototype form and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, there are 18 prototypes up and running. This autumn there will be another 40. By the time that the programme is complete, there will be 70,000 skilled people coming out of modern apprenticeships each year.

Mr. Jones: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Evennett: Does my hon. Friend agree—

Mr. Jones: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) cannot raise a point of order; it was not his substantive question.

Mr. Evennett *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us have a little quiet so that we can hear the hon. Gentleman who is on his feet—Mr. Evennett

Mr. Evennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that the many sixth formers staying on after the age of 16 and the many young people in training constitute a real achievement and a real success story? Does he further agree that that lays the foundation for successful training to be built on by those young people in the future, so that we shall have a well-trained and skilled work force?

Mr. Paice: Yes, my hon. Friend is right; 73 per cent. of 16-year-olds are now in full-time education, compared with only 48 per cent. 10 years ago. That is a tremendous achievement, and must bode well for the future.

Twenty-one-hour Rule

8. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance has been given by his Department in relation to the current operation of the 21-hour rule.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Service issued guidance to staff in January 1995 on the rule that allows people to study part time while claiming unemployment benefits. The guidance also referred to the 21-hour rule, which is a separate rule in income support.

Recent changes in the way that education courses are organised have made those rules increasingly difficult to administer. The purpose of the guidance was to reduce the inconsistency that was arising in practice.

Mr. Chisholm: So why are the Government adopting such a perverse approach towards reskilling the unemployed, first by issuing new regulations by the month to make it more difficult for unemployed people to take up part-time education and training courses, and then by announcing that only 16 hours of guided learning will be allowed under the rules for the jobseeker's allowance? Is that because the Government believe the surreal logic of their own arguments, or because they have not a clue how to run a modern economy, where skills are the key to success?

Miss Widdecombe: I find it difficult to believe that the hon. Gentleman can seriously be as ignorant of the new proposals as his question suggests. There is no reduction. At present, the 21-hour rule covers both guided learning hours and private study; in future we shall rely on a limit of 16 guided learning hours a week, with as much private study as is compatible with being available for work. There is no reduction—the same number of students will be able to study—and there is no reduction in the cost to us. The hon. Gentleman really should do more homework before asking such questions.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend agree that the profitable use of time while people are unemployed, especially if that directs them towards achieving the confidence that will enable them to get back to work, is most important? In that light, will she reconsider the very limited amount of notice that volunteers on unemployment benefit are allowed to give to the organisations that use them?

Miss Widdecombe: Volunteers can of course already exercise a delay before taking up a job, which unemployed people in general are not allowed to do. So we have already recognised that problem. However, my hon. Friend is right to say that constructive use of time while people are unemployed is important, especially in helping them to acquire skills and experience that can then be used in the labour market. For precisely that reason, we not only encourage volunteering but have made certain that our study rules have been carried through into the jobseeker's allowance so that people can study part time while on benefit. That seems to me an excellent balance to strike.

Mr. Simpson: What advice or explanation would the Minister offer to unemployed people undertaking part-time learning within the rules but who find that their benefits are cut because their fees exceed £100?

Miss Widdecombe: It is not the purpose of the benefits system to resource the education system, but a balance must be struck for people who are involved in modest, part-time study that does not impinge on their active job search. If such people could be on full-time or long and expensive courses, that is where they should be, rather than on benefit.

National Minimum Wage

9. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make an assessment of the effects of a national minimum wage on the employment prospects of young people

Mr. Oppenheim: In Belgium and France, which both have a national minimum wage set at a significant level, youth unemployment is, respectively, one and a half times and twice as high as youth unemployment in the United Kingdom. I will make an estimate of the effects of a national minimum wage in the United Kingdom when the

Opposition decide the level at which it would be set and what they would do about differentials. I notice that they are laughing at that.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is easy to talk about a minimum wage but more difficult to set the level? Does he recall that when President Clinton came to power in the United States he said that he would increase the rate from $4.25 to $4.75 but has failed to do so because he recognises how damaging that would be? Does he further agree that just talking about the minimum wage without setting the level is sheer tokenism and that the Opposition would do well to understand that?

Mr. Oppenheim: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) tittered loudly when my hon. Friend said that Labour had not set a level for the minimum wage. It is also interesting that the Labour leader last week scuttled off to the TUC to say that Labour would not set a level until after the next election. Labour is telling the low-paid that it will wave a magic wand and, at no cost, will increase their standard of living, but it is not prepared to be honest enough to reveal the cost in terms of lost jobs. That is the low level of opportunism and cynicism to which Labour policy has now sunk.

Mr. Ashton: Is the young Minister aware that it is now 20 years since a Labour Government introduced equal pay for women and that the Tories voted against it, saying exactly what they are now saying about a minimum wage—that it would destroy jobs? Is he aware that when the young women working at Marks and Spencer got their extra money they went to Debenhams and bought curtains and that when the people at Debenhams got their extra money they went to C and A and bought children's clothes, thus increasing the number of jobs?

Mr. Oppenheim: The not quite so young Minister will reply that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken in referring to the previous Labour Government because the previous two Labour Governments refused to implement a minimum wage. They, at least, were honest enough to admit that there was nothing they could do about the problem of differentials. I quote to the hon. Gentleman his former colleague, Lord Healey, who only a couple of months ago said on Radio 4:

"Don't kid yourselves—the minimum wage is something on which unions will build differentials . . . and therefore the minimum wage becomes a floor on which you erect a new tower."

Until the Opposition have the honesty and guts to tell the House at what level they would introduce the minimum wage and what they would do about differentials, the House will treat their policy with nothing but the contempt that it deserves.

Mr. Sykes: Will my hon. Friend ignore the old fogeys in the Opposition and confirm that policies such as the absurd social chapter and the minimum wage are shredding jobs in Europe even as we speak? Is he aware that a large company in my constituency cannot afford to build a factory in France because of such polices and has decided to double its production line in Scarborough instead?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is quite right. Unemployment in European countries such as Belgium and France, where the minimum wage is set at a significant level, is far higher than in Britain. The situation in the United States is also instructive. For years, successive Governments hardly raised the minimum wage. When he came to power two and a half years ago, President Clinton committed himself to raising it but he has done absolutely nothing about it because his own Labour Secretary, Robert Reich, said that it would threaten the recovery. Even the left-leaning Democratic Leadership Council recently said that the

"Minimum wage is anachronistic, it's a loser, it's got no life".

No wonder it is Labour party policy.

Ms Harman: Will the Minister accept that I am not prepared to be accused by him of tittering? It is puerile—*[Interruption.]* It is puerile and it demeans the debate.

Will the Minister confirm that the taxpayer now has to fork out £2.5 billion a year to top up the pay of the low-paid through benefits? Is not that nothing more than a subsidy for bad employers? Does he not realise that that sum will continue to spiral upwards unless he accepts that there should be a floor under pay with a national minimum wage? How long will he carry on topping up the bottomless pit that he has created in pay?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Lady was tittering; she is now wittering. She fails to mention that a minimum wage would cost the taxpayer more because it would increase unemployment, as it has in France, Spain and Belgium. If she is serious about that policy—if she is serious about putting a floor under low pay—why cannot she tell the House at what level a Labour Government would introduce the minimum wage, and what she would do about differentials?

Child Care

10. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to improve child care to assist women into employment.

Miss Widdecombe: We have committed £45 million to the out-of-school child care grant initiative to help create up to 50,000 new after-school and holiday places for school-age children throughout Great Britain.

Ms Eagle: I recognise that Britain's record in provision for the under-fives is the worst in the European Union and acknowledge that affordable and adequate child care is a major barrier to many women who are trying to work or who want to work longer hours. When will the Government do something to solve that problem, create a national child care strategy and start making some decent provision for 51 per cent. of the people in this country?

Miss Widdecombe: I suggest that the hon. Lady starts with her constituency. Perhaps she will welcome in her constituency the Wirral Latch Key scheme, the School House scheme, the Scamps scheme and the Rainbow scheme. When she has welcomed them, she might even smile at what is happening in her constituency.

Mrs. Gillan: Will my hon. Friend confirm that female earnings have increased by 30 per cent. since 1990, compared with male earnings, which have increased by only 23 per cent.? Will she further confirm that, compared with 1970, when women made up 36 per cent. of the work force, they now make up 46 per cent.? Are there not, in

practice, far fewer barriers to women in obtaining employment than that lot over there would have us believe?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, and it is entirely due to the policies of the Government, which have a greater effect on women than anything that that lot over there ever did.

Minimum Wage

11. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effects of a statutory minimum wage on the employment prospects of unemployed people.

Mr. Oppenheim: A statutory minimum wage would destroy jobs and job prospects. Set at two thirds of male median earnings and assuming full restoration of differentials, 2 million jobs could be lost. Even set at half male median earnings and assuming only half restoration of differentials, 750,000 jobs would be lost.

Sir Michael Neubert: Will my hon. Friend confirm that a report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies showed that a national minimum wage would benefit the richest 30 per cent. of the population more than the poorest 30 per cent.? Does not the adoption of such a policy sit rather oddly with the Opposition's claim that they will be tough on success and tough on the rewards of success?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is right. One of the major problems with a national minimum wage is that it would benefit better-off families disproportionately because many low-paid people are trainees or young workers who live in families with two or three incomes, so the national minimum wage would increase unemployment among poorer households and increase wealth in better-off households.

Mr. Eastham: I remind the Minister that when the Government abolished the wages councils three or four years ago they advanced the very same arguments. They said that abolition would create more jobs, but a horrendous number of young people are now without jobs. How does the Minister explain that?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman predicted when the wages councils were abolished that the wages of former wages council workers would fall; in fact, they have increased slightly faster than the wages of workers in the rest of the economy. I also remind the hon. Gentleman that the previous Labour Government abolished no fewer than 11 wages councils, affecting no fewer than 600,000 workers.

Industrial Relations

12. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the causes of Britain's current industrial relations situation.

Mr. Paice: The step-by-step reform of trade union and employment legislation has returned control of trade unions to their members and brought realism to the workplace. The industrial relations scene is better than at any time this century.

Lady Olga Maitland: How many working days were lost through strikes last year, and how does that figure compare with the one for 1979? How does Britain's strike record compare with that of the rest of the European Union?

Mr. Paice: Last year only 0.26 million working days were lost in only 178 stoppages. As has already been said this afternoon, that constitutes less than 1 per cent. of the 1979 figure and it is much lower than the averages of the 1970s and 1980s. Our record has been below the European average for the past nine years.

The Labour party has failed to tell the House which reforms it would get rid of if it had the chance to do so. What will be the price of buying off the Transport and General Workers vote on clause IV?

Madam Speaker: We have made abysmally slow progress with Employment questions owing to a combination of factors, such as long answers, long quotes, long questions and far too much noise. Let us make up for that now.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Ottaway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his Government's policies have done much to help the leisure industry in this country? So much so—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Hoyle: Sit down.

Madam Speaker: Who are you telling to sit down? Be careful.

Mr. Hoyle: I am telling the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) to sit down; I am trying to be helpful.

Mr. Ottaway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his Government have done much to help the leisure industry in this country—so much so, that Ladbroke leisure group has been able to award 1.2 million share options to its directors? Is my right hon. Friend aware that a member of the remuneration committee who approved that share option scheme is also Chairman of the Employment Select Committee?

The Prime Minister: As I said to the House last week, the Greenbury committee is examining executives' remuneration. A number of important issues must be addressed, especially the disclosure of remuneration to directors and ensuring that bonuses and share options

reflect the performance of a company. I am sure that practical, first-hand advice of that sort will be useful to every hon. Member.

Mr. Blair *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I must say to hon. Members that I have taken a Minister to task for less than that; I will not allow Back Benchers to hold up newspaper headlines.

Mr. Blair: Now that the electricity regulator has finally bowed to months of pressure and has cut prices because of excess profits, will the Prime Minister agree that there should be a thorough overhaul of the regulatory regime of all utilities so that we can be sure that the same thing is not happening in gas, water and in the other privatised monopolies?

The Prime Minister: As I understand the position, the regulator has decided to have a look at the prices charged by regional electricity companies to consumers. That shows that the regulatory system that the House approved is working and that the regulator is using his powers to act in the light of the information available. I think that the action of the Director General of Electric Supply does exactly that. It shows that he can take into account the latest information. Information has become available since his last review. He is now looking at it again. That shows that the system is flexible and is working.

Mr. Blair: Surely it shows precisely the opposite. Is not the point that the electricity regulator acted only after the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric exposed the full scale of the excess profits and because of public pressure, not his own internal investigations? Does that not strengthen the case for a review of the system to make sure that the same abuses are not happening in gas and water?

The Prime Minister: No, I think that the right hon. Gentleman has not taken the point fully on board. He cannot claim at one moment that the regulator has too few powers and a few moments later complain that he is using his powers to deal with the situation that has arisen. New circumstances have arisen in the regulator's mind, and the regulator has used his independent powers to look again at the question of pricing. Those are precisely the powers the House required him to have and he is now using them.

Mr. Blair: The information became available not because of the regulatory system but because of the external requirements after the bid. Does the Prime Minister not understand that unless he acts firmly to stop the abuses in the privatised utilities—whether they are the pay deals, the overcharging or the excess profits—they will stand as a visible symbol of everything that is rotten in a Conservative Government?

The Prime Minister: I know that the right hon. Gentleman has now managed to unleash his soundbite, but what he is actually proposing would not enlarge but would narrow the authority and options of the regulator. The fact that this arose out of something that the regulator did not determine shows how wide his powers are. That is the point. The right hon. Gentleman is saying that the regulator should have acted only if he himself had discovered precisely what was likely to happen.

Sir Peter Hordern: Will my right hon. Friend make it his first priority to travel the country and start a national debate on the importance of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange? Is it not extraordinary that a major political party should spend so much time on clause IV and does it not prove—

Madam Speaker: Order. As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Prime Minister has no responsibility for that matter. He is, no doubt, coming to a question for which the Prime Minister has responsibility.

Sir Peter Hordern: Will my right hon. Friend consider travelling the country to establish whether there should be common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange?

The Prime Minister: I think the evidence of the past two or three decades will spare me the necessity of travelling the country on that point because very few people who have sensibly looked at the matter do not believe that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is right to seek the abolition of a dinosaur that most sensible people realise has been dead for the past 20 or 30 years. The only surprise is that a substantial number in the right hon. Gentleman's party still do not understand that.

Mr. Ashdown: How does the Prime Minister justify the fact that, contrary to the specific recommendations of his own personal efficiency unit, the amount of public money that the Government spend on private consultants has now increased by £130 million to £865 million—sufficient to provide every child in the country with a year of pre-school education? How can the Prime Minister expect parents, teachers and governors to cut, cut, cut, when the Government's record is spend, spend, spend?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman did not address the savings and improvements brought about by the activities of consultants. All that concerns him is making a spurious point that would have been better made about his own Liberal Democrat-controlled county council in Somerset. If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the record on consultancies, he will find that one costing £50,000 yielded savings of tens of millions of pounds for the taxpayer.

Mr. Rowe: Did my right hon. Friend note that in the recent debate on utilities many Opposition Members were keen to see utilities restored to the public sector? Is not it an extraordinary definition of monopoly to imagine that in a world in which foreign companies compete globally with our former public utilities, we should not stimulate competitiveness across the world?

The Prime Minister: Opposition Members may still relish the day when it cost the taxpayer £50 million a week to subsidise utilities so that Ministers could run them inefficiently. These days, those utilities are yielding about the same amount of money each day for the taxpayer. Many utilities are selling their services and expertise abroad to great effect, generating from overseas activities huge sums of money for this country.

Q3. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Rooney: It is three and a half years since Operation 2000 was launched. Is the Prime Minister

aware that today fewer than 4 per cent. of directors and fewer than 3 per cent. of senior managers are women? Does he consider Operation 2000 a success?

The Prime Minister: When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster speaks in this afternoon's debate, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate the improved opportunities for women across a range of circumstances—not least in public appointments for which the Government are directly responsible, where there has been a dramatic improvement. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is some way to go, but a significant improvement has been made in recent years, and I look forward to that continuing.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to read the document published by the Department of National Heritage last week, "Tourism: Competing with the Best"? It states that tourism could be the largest single issue by the year 2000. Tourism currently employs 1.5 million people, but the report makes it clear that we could do better. Does my right hon. Friend agree that tourism should have higher priority and that a single body should be responsible for encouraging inward tourism?

The Prime Minister: I should like to reflect with greater care on my hon. Friend's last point because of regional disparities in tourism in Scotland, Wales, the west country and elsewhere. My hon. Friend is right about tourism's importance and the number of people that it employs. In some parts of the United Kingdom—not least, most recently, Northern Ireland—increased tourism is making a material improvement to the local economy.

Q4. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Burden: Does the Prime Minister recall specifically ruling out three months ago Government action on executive salaries on the ground that it would constitute—I believe that I quote the right hon. Gentleman correctly—"a pay policy for a small number of key executives"? In the light of the right hon. Gentleman's statement to the House last week, does he think that is a policy or is not a policy—or, as usual, does he not know?

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether you, Madam Speaker, would like to let the hon. Gentleman try again, so that he may get his question right. Only one side of the House wants a pay policy for top executives. Labour wants a pay policy for people at the top—a maximum wage at the top, and a maximum wage at the bottom because then it would have the justification for a pay policy right the way down British industry. I am seeking to cope with abuses where they occur. If the hon. Gentleman had read what I said last week, he would understand that.

Q5. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that education provides an escalator of opportunity for all children? Does he believe that choice and standards would benefit from the abolition of grammar schools, grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges, all of which are popular? Would not the abolition of grant-maintained schools be particularly harsh on parents who prefer them to schools run by local education authorities, especially in Islington?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that education is one of the areas that gives the greatest opportunity to people. The reforms that we have introduced in recent years extend choice, create a diverse education system and aim to give the best possible education to every child. It is for that reason that we have made reforms right the way through the education system—reforms that have been welcomed by parents and schoolteachers and, increasingly, are welcomed and used by hon. Members in every part of the House.

Q6. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lloyd: During this, the 50th anniversary of the ending of the war, will the Prime Minister today give some consideration to that generation who were prepared to fight and, in many cases, made considerable personal sacrifices in forced labour camps, for example, in Europe and elsewhere? Is the Prime Minister of the view that it is a fitting reward for that generation that they now spend their lives in poverty as pensioners under the Government?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows the respect that everyone in Britain has for the generation who fought in the war. He will also know what has been done, not just in the past few years but during the past couple of generations, to ensure that their living standards are as high as can possibly be the case.

An hon. Member: Not successful.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says, "Not successful." Perhaps he would like to reflect on the number of improvements that we made in 1979 that had not been introduced by the previous Labour Government.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the serious allegations made in the *Daily Express* yesterday about vote rigging by Labour party hopefuls and the exploitation of ethnic minorities, have you received a request from Labour Front-Bench Members to change the business of the House today, so that that fresh example of Labour sleaze can be fully debated by the House?

Madam Speaker: No, I have not.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall take points of order from alternate sides.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Rather than that, I wondered whether there was any chance of getting a statement from the Government about the future of the Consett steel works?

Madam Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows the answer to that.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for a Member of the House who sits on a Select Committee to be interviewing his own clients? That is happening on a Select Committee of the House at 4.15 this afternoon. It seems wrong that the Chairman of that Select Committee should be interviewing his own clients, because there may be a conflict of interests.

Madam Speaker: I was not aware that the interview was with the Chairman's own clients. I do not know the procedure on such a matter, but as the hon. Member has made a serious allegation, I must obviously look into the situation.

Mr. Shaw *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I know exactly the point of order, and I shall now deal with it.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you advise me whether there is a conflict of interest in the Chancellor investigating the Barings collapse, when that bank contributed some £700,000 to Tory party funds?

Madam Speaker: I think that we have seen the end of points of order, which are not at all points of order but points of view.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member raised a point of order with me two days ago. Does he have another one?

Mr. Duncan: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you consider inviting the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) to apologise to the House? He has publicly declared his intention to flout the rules and conventions of the House, which now appears to be Labour party policy.

In a public statement, he has demanded that the Committee stage of the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill be packed 100 per cent. with supporters of the Bill. That, if it is anything, is legislative fascism. May I invite you to ask him to apologise to the House?

Madam Speaker: If any hon. Member is flouting the rules and procedures of the House, I will take that seriously. I shall look at what the hon. Gentleman has said. If he made a statement to that effect—

Mr. Duncan *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member does not need to give me a copy. I have a set of Clerks who will provide me with copies of everything I want, thank you very much.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order are getting totally out of hand. They are no longer points of order. Hon. Members seem to think that we are still on television. That has quite a lot to do with it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

I know the dodge on Tuesdays. Hon. Members want to get on television when they have not been able to ask a question.

I will take only genuine points of order. They had better be genuine points of order from now on.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), Madam Speaker. As one who will be sitting on—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that point. Will the hon. Member resume his seat? The hon. Member for Dover raised an issue with me. It will remain with me, and I will deal with it. Thank you.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will you confirm that it is the tradition of the House that, when a Bill receives its Second Reading and goes to Committee, the Committee reflects the views of the House when it votes? Given that the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill on Friday had the unanimous support of the House, it therefore follows that the Committee should contain Members who reflect the views of the House.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct.

I am able now to respond to the point of order that was raised by the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw). Perhaps I can make it quite clear. I understand that the Chairman of the Employment Committee declared his interest at the outset of the relevant inquiry.

Mr. David Shaw: My point was not that the issue was not declared; it was declared. I was not suggesting that it was not. My point was about the conflict of interest. The Committee is examining whether directors of companies are capable of presenting their case properly. The Chairman of the Committee has an interest in a business

that deals with the presentation of directors' issues and cases. Therefore, there is a direct conflict of interest between his parliamentary and his business roles.

Madam Speaker: That is for the Committee to determine. The Chairman of the Committee declared his interest. If the Committee was not satisfied, it would have required him to leave the Chair during that period. It did not do so, and the Chairman declared his interest quite properly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would you confirm, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Just a moment.

Mr. Skinner: Would you agree, Madam Speaker, that, if we investigated the Chairmen of all the Select Committees that are chaired by Tory Back Benchers, we would almost certainly find a conflict of interest in nearly every case, and would be without a Chairman in every one of those Committees?

Madam Speaker: I certainly would not agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I think that we have more positive things to do, especially this afternoon.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Have you had a request from a Treasury Minister to make a statement today about the Audit Commission, and whether there will be a full public inquiry into the grants-for-votes scandal which is sweeping Labour councils at the moment?

Madam Speaker: If any Minister had been seeking to make a statement today, it would have been on the Annunciator screen by 1 o'clock.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would you confirm that it was the Leader of the House of Commons who tabled the resolutions, which we all approved, on the question of conflict of interest in Select Committees, following reports produced in 1992 by the Select Committee on Members' Interests, that the report was carried unanimously, and that the Chairman of the Select Committee involved is abiding by the resolution that was carried by the Commons?

Madam Speaker: I have no doubt about that, and I assumed that hon. Members who take an interest in the proceedings and the activities of the House were aware of all that, and should not be raising these issues on points of order.

BILLS PRESENTED

Rape Victims Compensation

Mr. John Austin-Walker, supported by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Ms Jean Corston, Ms Joan Walley and Ms Tessa Jowell, presented a Bill to amend the law in respect of the compensation payable to victims of rape by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 31 March, and to be printed. [Bill 68.]

Adoptive Mothers (Maternity Rights)

Mrs. Helen Jackson, supported by Ms Tessa Jowell, Mrs. Cheryl Gillan, Ms Liz Lynne, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Ms Glenda Jackson, Ms Joyce Quin, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. John Gunnell, Mr. Kevin Hughes, Mr. Richard Burden and Ms Jean Corston, presented a Bill to amend Part III of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 and Part XII of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 so as to require the Secretary of State by order to confer rights on adoptive mothers in relation to employment similar to those enjoyed by mothers whose children are born to them, including the right of an adoptive mother to paid leave and protection from dismissal during the period following the date on which the child is due to have its home with her with a view to adoption: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 31 March, and to be printed. [Bill 70.]

Women and Information Technology

3.38 pm

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide means of increasing women's involvement in information technology.

The Bill focuses on measures to address the serious under-representation of women in information technology at all levels—a result of the IT culture that alienates girls at a very early age, and continues to deny them access throughout their careers. The Bill is not a matter for discussion; it is a mandate for action to deal with the problem, and provides the opportunity for a response to an expanding IT employment market. So far, the response has been slow, incoherent and underfunded, and I demand a change.

The Bill recognises that we are at the take-off stage of another IT skills crisis, as reported comprehensively by Philip Virgo in his 1994 IT skills report entitled, forebodingly, "The Gathering Storm". As IT employment figures increased, the tragedy of women's under-representation was acknowledged by the Government in their White Paper, "Realising Our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology". To put it simply, there is a sharp and steady increase in demand for IT labour, and a decline in supply. The gap is widening so quickly, when it should be halted by attention to our female population as a resource.

In last year's report on women in science, engineering and technology, "The Rising Tide", a committee—chaired by a man—made powerful recommendations; but I believe that the situation is so serious that only concerted effort and a high priority will dent the already male edifice of information technology. By the year 2006, women will account for 80 per cent. of the growth in the domestic labour market. There are tremendous opportunities for women in IT, but the evidence shows that they are underprepared. That evidence makes depressing reading.

The percentage of girls studying computer science at A-level dropped from 22 per cent. in 1978 to a mere 19 per cent. in 1993. Today, entry to computer science courses in United Kingdom universities is only 17 per cent. female, compared with 22 per cent. in 1980; yet 65 per cent. of employers want to employ someone with a degree qualification. At Southampton university—one of the country's leading research universities—only nine out of 93 of this year's first-year intake in computer science are women: fewer than 10 per cent. In much study at degree level now, particularly in the Open university, home computing is a critical component.

As for employment, only 4 per cent. of IT managers are women, compared with 9 per cent. of managers generally. IBM recently replaced its outgoing chief executive not with the widely tipped and respected Ellen Hancock, the senior vice-president, but with Lou Gerstner from Nabisco, a cereal company.

What causes the problems? Research in past years suggested that there was little gender difference in attitudes to IT among people aged between six and 10. That has clearly changed: even those aged seven are beginning to see computing as masculine. With the rapid growth in lower-priced, hand-held games, the retail market is making it clear whom its targets really are. Let us take Gameboy, for example. Does anyone seriously believe that young boys would play with something called "Gamegirl"? So Gameboy it is: what a perfect example of toys for the boys.

Most computer games are inherently male-friendly, involving football games, space wars and "destroy" and "conqueror" themes. The use of weapons is common, and violence is often portrayed. This is a retail market that targets young males, and reinforces the predominantly male IT culture at a perilously early age.

We cannot afford to ignore the worsening problem. IT will be the most economically critical sector of the 21st century; the advent of the information super-highway will mean that information is power, and unless there is intervention, women will effectively be excluded.

The IT jobs market is portrayed in a grossly male way. One has only to examine the advertisement pages of the main computer journals. They are full of images of would-be male employees playing football or touching the tape first in an athletics competition. The excellent leaflet, "Why Me? Why IT?", produced by the National Council for Educational Technology, addresses 14 to 16-year-old girls. I fear, however, that by that age, the damage has already been done.

Compared with other countries, Britain is falling behind, with only 23 per cent. of IT employees being women, compared with 39 per cent. in France, 45 per cent. in the United States and 55 per cent. in Singapore. IT is the key to keeping Britain up to date, to competing with other countries and to making the most of our industrial base. A company's success depends on how it applies and uses IT, and so does Britain's success. Our international competitiveness is at stake here. This can hardly be called a women's issue.

I recently visited John Brown, the engineering construction conglomerate, to see its IT global super-highway in action. We linked up with Australia, Bombay and Texas. It was impressive, but it was so disappointing to see not a single woman in this fast-emerging world of work, in which there is high investment and the need to be constantly ahead.

I also visited British Telecom's research headquarters at Martlesham. It was a fascinating day, but again, I discovered that, in one important section researching the new technology of packet switching, of 65 software engineers, only three were women. It was hard to swallow. Although women represent 45 per cent. of total employment, in IT jobs they represent less than 17 per cent., and they are mostly in the lower-skilled jobs. Even in sectors of the economy that are predominantly female, there are disproportionately few women in senior IT positions.

There is a popular and unfortunate caricature of women as being congenitally incapable of dealing with machines. One has only to witness the jokes about women drivers, although we have been proved to be safer than males. There is no evidence that I know of that women have any problem with washing machines, dishwashers or microwave ovens, unlike a great many men, who seem to be afflicted by sudden blind spots when it comes to technology in the kitchen. So many of the skills necessary in IT employment and especially in senior management, including the ability to adapt and to communicate, are signature characteristics of the female population. The Bill would address many of the problems.

Henley Centre research shows that women have less experience and confidence in the new technology. Some 70 per cent. of men feel confident in using video recorders, but only 58 per cent. of women feel confident. The research, however, relied on asking men and women whether they could use them. I do not think that it is a gross generalisation to say that there are not many men who admit to not knowing how to work something. The evidence is that it is men who first learn to use the video and the home computer, and that most home computers are bought for boys, by fathers and for fathers. The evidence is that men control their use in the home.

The market cannot solve the IT skills shortage, and it cannot produce well-qualified young women to take up substantial employment opportunities, if they have already turned their backs on a career in IT in the primary schools. The Government have made a few attempts in this area, but those attempts have been fragmented, unco-ordinated and largely ineffective. We have no time to waste. If the situation is allowed to continue, the real losers will be not just women, but Britain's competitiveness in our rapidly changing global economy.

3.48 pm

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I had not intended to speak against the Bill until I heard the terms in which the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) moved the motion. To establish what I hope are my non-sexist credentials, I point out that I ran a programme called Women into Science and Engineering—WISE—and I am on record as saying in terms of engineering that we cannot afford to turn our back on 50 per cent. of the nation's intellect. We have a shortage of well-trained engineers and scientists; we need them. Wasted human and other resources are not to be tolerated in this country.

As someone who earned his living in the computer industry until I came into the House, I know that opinions are changing on how people are best qualified for entry into the computer and IT industries and how people can be best trained into becoming articulate and well-educated users of those systems. It may sound a heresy to say this today, but there is growing evidence that employers will go a long way to avoid hiring computer scientists. They would far sooner hire analysts and programmers who have not been tainted by that particular discipline.

Therefore, to measure the success of women and girls, at 16 or 18, or as graduates at 21 years old, on whether they populate those computer science courses to an appropriately balanced level is to embark on an area of assessment which may be already discredited in the eyes of those who hire people as analysts, programmers or future electronics engineers.

I oppose the Bill because I adopt what will probably be seen as another heresy, but which we shall come to recognise in due course as having grounds for review. I plead guilty as someone who adopted the IT revolution root and branch, but there is now reason to believe that we have too many computers in our schools and that they are being used by children who are too young. We should welcome computer literacy, but a module which says that there shall be some compulsory introduction into IT keyboard skills for our youngsters in primary schools and even in infant schools may be a grave error. I shall tell the hon. Lady why I believe that to be so.

One of the strengths of the countries that are now making great headway in IT skills and in developing information technology and electronics industries is the highly traditional education system. Japanese young people or German young people or Singaporeans or Malaysians are not allowed anywhere near a computer keyboard until they have fully developed that muscle in their heads which we call a brain. To turn to the hon. Lady's second point, it therefore need not be a valid measurement to argue that girls who do not populate computer classes as much as boys are therefore at a disadvantage.

When one wants a software program, especially a complex program, written in the world today, does the House know where one goes? One goes to India. Software factories there are populated by Indian graduates who did not touch a keyboard until they were 16 years old, but learned multiplication up to the 20 times table ad nauseam at school.

I appreciate that what I am saying may be unorthodox at this stage, but the hon. Lady's speech was more compliant with the culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s than it is with the hiring culture of IT and electronics companies today. I am not arguing against IT skills or against women acquiring IT skills in the appropriate proportion, but other nations are showing us that the fashion of early education, total education and immersion at too early an age is merely that: a fashion. I repeat that I say that as someone who earned my living in the industry for a long period. I oppose the Bill, because the logic and the measurement on which it was asserted may well be flawed.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Judith Church, Ms Janet Anderson, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms Jean Corston, Ms Angela Eagle, Ms Margaret Hodge, Ms Glenda Jackson, Ms Tessa Jowell, Mrs. Jane Kennedy, Ms Estelle Morris, Mrs. Bridget Prentice and Mrs. Barbara Roche.

WOMEN AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Ms Judith Church accordingly presented a Bill to provide means of increasing women's involvement in information technology: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 April, and to be printed. [Bill 69.]

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. From my recollection, Speaker Selwyn Lloyd ruled that hon. Members who spoke in opposition to ten-minute Bills were under an obligation to carry through their speech and vote. Could we have some guidance from you, at your convenience, as to what the practice is? It is a bit of an abuse to speak on a subject and then not—

Madam Speaker: Order. I can answer that point of order right away. That has never been the practice. Ten-minute Bills are often opposed. That was the case even in Speaker Selwyn Lloyd's time. The only procedure that we have to carry out is that I have to hear the hon. Member who opposes the Bill say "No" when I put the Question. He or she does not have to name tellers or seek a Division. The hon. Member must call out clearly, "No." That is what the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) did. I am perfectly satisfied with those procedures, which I have always seen carried out in this House.

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Women

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.56 pm

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the Government's failure to implement its undertakings made at the 1985 UN Conference to promote the progress of women towards equality by the year 2000; in particular notes the damaging effects of labour market deregulation on the position of women, the growing divide between families with two earners and families with none, and the cutbacks in pension entitlement which have had a particularly damaging effect on women; and believes that, taken together with its failure to implement a national childcare strategy, the Government is wasting the talent and diminishing the life opportunities of women in the UK.

This is the second annual debate that the Labour party has organised in order to ensure that, henceforth, at least once a year the House of Commons takes stock of the progress of women towards equality. Last year, in the same week—the week of International Women's Day—we staged the first such debate to take place since a Labour Government passed the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

It is no coincidence that that debate took place when John Smith was the leader of the Labour party. Many tributes have been paid to John, and I would like, if I may, to add a tribute on behalf of British women. John's deep commitment to fairness, social justice and public service is well recognised. His fierce commitment to women's equality has been less widely celebrated. I suspect that John's commitment was particularly strong because he had three daughters. He was immensely proud of his daughters, and he simply wanted the world to be fair for them; he therefore realised that the world had to change.

It was under John's leadership that the Labour party committed itself to the selection of women candidates in half of all the seats that we must and will win in order to form the next Government. The process that was agreed is now working its way through. The consequence will be that, after the next election when we occupy the Government Benches, there will be at least 80 or perhaps 100 women Members among our ranks.

That will constitute only a quarter of the parliamentary Labour party, and there will still be some way to go to reach equality. However, I believe that that number will be sufficiently large to transform the culture of the House of Commons. Women of all ages, backgrounds and ethnicity will be a normal part of public life in Britain.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): The hon. Lady will know that it is the Labour party's policy in my part of the world to create a directly elected Scottish Assembly of which, by law, half the members will have to be women. What does that do for the role of women in Scottish public life? What sort of electoral system will she introduce to ensure that that happens?

Ms Short: I applaud that commitment. Parliaments around the world are moving to require half the candidates to be women—

Mr. Robertson: Members.

Ms Short: They are moving to half women representation in Parliaments. Parliaments around the world recognise—in this regard, our Parliament is very backward—that democracy is incomplete when half the population is so grossly under-represented in the democratic politics of that country. I look forward to the Scottish Parliament being 50 per cent. men and 50 per cent. women. It will be a finer Parliament for that reason.

Once Labour has made the breakthrough which will produce so many women in the next House of Commons, other parties will scrabble to catch up with us. The transformation and improvement that that will bring to British politics and to the House of Commons will stand as a lasting tribute to John Smith.

The second change that will remain as a result of John Smith's commitment to women's equality is this annual House of Commons debate. Following last year's debate, I wrote to the then Secretary of State for Employment and Minister with responsibility for women, now Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), to suggest that the Government should facilitate an annual debate to monitor the progress of women towards equality.

The right hon. Gentleman wrote back and said that there were many opportunities to discuss sex equality matters, and that the general principle was that the business of the House was a matter for the business managers, not for him. Well, I must say that my relationship with the Labour business managers must be much better than the right hon. Gentleman's relationship with his business managers. Given his failure, the Opposition decided that, in opposition and in government, we will facilitate an annual debate to monitor Government policies in promoting women's equality.

Weak as the posture of the Secretary of State for Employment was a year ago, it is interesting to compare the Government's response to the 1994 debate with their response in 1995. Last year, the debate was answered, as I have said, by the former Secretary of State for Employment, who was openly willing to admit that he was also the Minister with responsibility for women.

This year, we have a new Secretary of State for Employment. He is notorious for his hatred of all things European, many of which benefit women, and, of course, for being a fanatical advocate of low pay. We could only imagine his embarrassment when he found that his promotion to Employment Secretary also made him Minister with responsibility for women. The consequence seems to be that he has quietly dropped that aspect of his responsibility. The result is that the Government's 1992 reorganisation of the Whitehall machinery to deliver equality for women, centring responsibility on the Department of Employment, has been turned into nonsense.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster now chairs the Cabinet sub-Committee on women's issues. The sex equality branch remains in the Department of

Employment. The Secretary of State pretends that such issues have nothing to do with him, and he leaves his responsibilities to the Minister of State, who, of course, is responsible for opposing the legal right to abortion in Britain, and who left her Church because it decided to ordain women priests.

We see the Government's commitment from 1994 to 1995 and their commitment to equality for women deteriorate because of the ministerial reshuffle. It is noticeable, however, that, when we refer to the Government's behaviour on the international stage, we find a completely different picture. It seems that the Government are willing to sign up for international agreements that commit them to action to promote women's equality, but that they have no intention of publicising those commitments at home, or of turning them into reality.

It is important to examine the Government's record on this matter in 1995, because the commitments that they made at the United Nations conference in Nairobi in 1985 are to be revised and updated in Beijing in September. I understand that the Minister of State, Department of Employment, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), is to head the British delegation.

Already, Britain has produced a glossy report suggesting that the position of women in Britain is highly advanced and deeply satisfactory. Indeed, the Government boast about that in their amendment. Let us therefore briefly examine some of the commitments that the Government made in 1985 and compare them with their record.

On employment, in paragraph 67 of the Nairobi forward-looking strategies, the Government agree that

"Employment legislation should ensure equity and provide benefits for women . . . by providing minimum wage standards, insurance benefits, safe working conditions and the right to organise."

We must conclude either that the Government were in favour of minimum wage protection in 1985 and changed their minds by 1995, or that they cynically signed up to those agreements without intending to implement them.

In paragraph 135 of the Nairobi forward-looking strategies, the Government agreed that

"Measures based on legislation and trade union action should be taken to ensure equity in all jobs and avoid exploitative trends in part-time work, as well as the feminisation of part-time, temporary and seasonal work."

In 1985, the Government appeared to be keen to avoid women being trapped in low-paid work. In 1995, 87 per cent. of part-time workers in Britain are women, and they are overwhelmingly low-paid workers.

The final part of the forward-looking strategies to which I shall refer concerns governmental machinery to deliver equality for women. Paragraph 57 states:

"Appropriate governmental machinery for monitoring and improving the status of women should be established where it is lacking. To be effective, this machinery should be established at a high level of government and should be ensured adequate resources, commitment and authority to advise on the impact on women of all government policies".

It is fair to say that, in 1992, the Government supported that recommendation; but by 1995, with the new Secretary of State for Employment, it had been ditched.

Did the Government ever really support the agreement that they made in Nairobi in 1985? Did they mean to implement those commitments—particularly the commitment to protect the minimum wage—or were they so embarrassed when they found themselves out of step with world opinion on women's equality that they agreed to commitments which they had no intention of honouring?

My view, and the view of the Labour party, is that the Government's failure to implement the undertakings which they gave in Nairobi in 1985—particularly on the question of low pay and the minimum wage—is wasting the talent and diminishing the life opportunities of women in the United Kingdom, and is seriously damaging the performance of the British economy.

Despite their commitments in Nairobi, the Government have adopted a strategy of encouraging competition by wage cutting. Thus, they have stripped away all the protections which previously existed for low-paid workers. That is why they are so strongly opposed to the European social chapter and to the national minimum wage.

Women have borne the brunt of the Government's strategy, but it has also been deeply damaging to the position of men in the labour market and to the overall performance of the British economy.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Does the hon. Lady agree that there is a fairly old-fashioned distinction in attitudes between both sides of the House? The Opposition are arguing for equality for women, while the theme among my hon. Friends is equality of opportunity for women. If, as the hon. Lady wishes, equality for women is to be mandatory in this House in terms of the imposition of quotas for Members, does she take her logic further into any other sectors of public or industrial endeavour? Is she arguing for a quasi-quota system in other types of activity?

Ms Short: The Labour party has proudly decided that we will put forward women candidates in half the seats which we intend to win to form a Government after the next election. We believe that British democracy is gravely incomplete when women are so under-represented in the House. We also believe that the quality of debate in the Chamber will increase enormously when more women are represented here.

I take the view that the measures which are appropriate to ensure that we have proper and democratic representation here are not necessarily the same measures as should be used to promote women in employment, but the principle of promoting women's equality should inform all our social policy.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Is it not rich for a Conservative Member to criticise the Labour party for ensuring that half our electoral representation will be women, when the vice-chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), spends half her life trying to persuade Conservative associations around the country to select women candidates, because there is a 50 per cent. target in the Conservative party for candidates at the next election?

Ms Short: Those who will the end, will the means, and the Labour party will deliver the goods. There will be a massive increase in the number of women in the next

[Ms Short]

House of Commons, and I am sure that the Conservative party will introduce stern measures to catch up with us after we have made that enormous breakthrough.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Is the hon. Lady not aware that her party's campaign to bring more women into Parliament is patronising and insulting to women, because it is trying to introduce positive discrimination rather than allowing women to get to Westminster on merit, which is how I prefer to be here?

Ms Short: The hon. Lady must be aware that the view of the people of Britain is that the people who are in the House of Commons at the moment could not possibly have been selected on merit. The selection of a lot more women to come to the House will massively increase the average standard overnight.

The central argument that I shall put before the House is that women's demand for equality is not a zero-sum game; it is not a question of advancing women at the expense of men. Indeed, the present Government strategy of encouraging low-paid employment damages all interests. Labour's strategy, based on the need for a minimum wage, full-time rights for part-time workers and family-friendly employment policies, will benefit the performance of the British economy and the quality of life for all.

If we look at some of the facts, we see a devastating picture. In recent years, there has been a massive growth in part-time, low-paid and insecure employment, from 4.6 million part-time jobs in 1979 to 6 million in 1994; 87 per cent. of part-time workers are women, and nearly half of all women work in part-time jobs.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with part-time work in itself, but in Britain part-time work goes with low pay, poor employment rights, little pension entitlement and little access to training or promotion. We have the biggest gender pay gap in the European Union. Women part-timers earn only 59 per cent. of the hourly rate of male full-timers, and even women full-timers earn only 72 per cent. of the male rate.

The average mother of two loses half her total lifetime earnings as a consequence of having children; mothers in the United Kingdom have the largest such earnings loss in Europe. There is, of course, no income loss for men as a result of the birth of their children.

The Government's encouragement of low-paid work and the lack of a national child care strategy—we have another record here: Britain has the lowest level of publicly funded child care in the EU—traps many women in badly paid part-time work, and permanently blights their life opportunities.

The effects continue into old age, because low-paid workers have poor pension entitlements. In 1992, one in six women retired on a full state pension, compared with two in three men, and 87 per cent. of single pensioners on income support are women. The Government's pensions policy, which has eroded the value of the state pension and cut the value of the state earnings-related pension scheme, will disproportionately damage women pensioners and ensure that, in future, an even higher proportion of them will have to survive in poverty.

Under the Government's strategy, all parties lose. The consequences of the strategy that promotes part-time low-paid work for women also damages the interests of men. The restructuring of work since the 1970s has led to a massive increase in the number of men excluded from the labour market.

According to the family expenditure survey, in 1971, 93 per cent. of men were in full-time employment, 1 per cent. were working part time and 7 per cent. were not working. The deterioration has been devastating. By 1992, only 75 per cent. of men were working full time, 5 per cent. were working part time, and 20 per cent. were not working. The shortfall has been only partly made up by the growth in women's employment, as the number of hours worked in the economy has dropped; fewer hours are worked in the British economy now than were worked in 1979.

When we Members of Parliament sit in our advice bureaux, many of us find that older men who have been made redundant come to see us and talk about the fact that they are no longer employed and have exhausted their right to unemployment benefit. They say how useless and marginalised they feel having to live in a household that relies on their wives' earnings. I am very conscious that many families in that situation find that their marriages break up. That is one of the cruel consequences of the Government's employment strategy that affects men.

Thus, using women as cheap labour does not benefit men, but leads to their being displaced in the labour market. Women and men have a shared interest in achieving decent employment rights and pay for part-timers, to bring to an end the pricing down of secure jobs.

The effect of the changes between women and men in the labour market also increases the polarisation and divisions in British society. While part-time work and unemployment has grown, British full-time workers work the longest hours in Europe. We are witnessing a growth in the number of pressurised, work-rich, two-earner families, and impoverished, marginalised work-poor families. That is a result of the fact that traditional male jobs are declining, while the new jobs are low-paid women's jobs, with wages insufficient to support a family. The consequences are that only women living with an earning partner can afford to take them.

Eighty per cent. of women part-timers are married or cohabiting, and 91 per cent. of them have earning partners. An Equal Opportunities Commission study projects that such labour market changes will continue for the next 10 years. The consequences are socially and economically unsustainable. Growing male unemployment and a rising divorce rate will lead to a continuing growth in the number of families trapped outside the labour market.

The changes in the labour market are generating a massive benefits bill. Unemployment costs £10.1 billion in direct benefits to the unemployed. In addition, a portion of the £18.7 billion spent on the sick and disabled goes to people seeking work, especially older discouraged male workers. More than 500,000 low-paid families are dependent on family credit to bring them up to the subsistence level.

For example, the average payment to lone mothers is £48.69 a week. This subsidy to low pay is costing the taxpayer more than £1 billion in family credit alone. We have to ask whether it is right that the taxpayer should subsidise the wage levels paid by some of the meanest employers in the land.

It is clear that the Government's failure to promote women's equality at work and family-friendly employment policies that enable men and women to work and care for their families is costing us enormous sums in benefit expenditure. It is also damaging the performance of the British economy. Competition by wage cutting leads to high labour turnover and poor investment in training. In both respects, Britain is very backward.

Britain is one place below Turkey at the bottom of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's skills league for the proportion of 18-year-olds in education. Only one third of the United Kingdom work force has a vocational qualification; apprenticeships have virtually disappeared; and fewer people participate in higher education than in any of our major competitor countries. Investment as a percentage of gross domestic product in Britain was only 17.5 per cent. between 1979 and 1992, compared to 29.8 per cent. in Japan.

It is clear that there is no turning back from the changes that flow from women's demands for an equal chance in society. The days when women ran the home and men ran the rest are long gone. It is absolutely clear that women have made many advances. The struggle for the vote, for education and for the right to own property after marriage, access to contraception and the right to escape from a violent partner have transformed our lives compared to those of our mothers' and grandmothers' generations, but there is still a very long way to go before women have full equality.

Women are still absent from senior positions in all our major institutions. As has already been said, there are not many women Members of Parliament, nor are there many female judges, managers, senior police officers, professors and so on. As I said, the fate of nearly half British women is to be trapped in part-time, low-paid work, which damages their life opportunities permanently, right through to retirement.

The Labour party believes strongly that a modern and successful economy must promote equal opportunities for women. Thus, our commitment to the social chapter, the national minimum wage, full-time rights for part-time workers, a national child care strategy and family-friendly employment policies will improve the quality of life for women and men, so that both can enjoy a satisfying career and share in the care of their children, and their parents as they become more elderly, without being forced to depend on state benefits. However, we also believe that we must encourage investment in training and infrastructure to secure a healthy economic future.

The present Government's policy of encouraging low-paid employment is deeply damaging to the women of the United Kingdom and to the performance of the British economy. Labour's strategy will promote the interests of women, stop men being pushed out of the work force, and lead to a high-training, high-investment economy. We have a backward Government, taking us continually further backwards.

4.20 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"notes with approval the progress made in the United Kingdom towards equality and increasing opportunities for women, as described in the United Kingdom National Report for the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women; and calls on the Government to continue the policies which have made this possible.".

Last year, it was a pleasure for me to respond to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) in a wide-ranging debate about women in Britain. As Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on women's issues, I am proud once again to have the chance to respond to her opening speech, and to remind the House of what the Government are doing to promote equality of opportunity for women.

I am glad that the newly appointed Government co-chair of the Women's National Commission, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), is here to reply to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend on that important appointment. I know that the House will join me in wishing her well, and also in thanking her predecessor, Lady Denton, for the great contribution that she made during her three years in that post.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): Hear, hear.

Mr. Hunt: I hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment echoing my views. When I was Secretary of State for Employment, I came greatly to value and respect the work of Lady Denton and the work of the Women's National Commission.

I am interested to note that, last Thursday, the debate was originally entitled, "The Position of Women in Britain", but the title on the Order Paper has now altered to, "Lives of Women in the United Kingdom". I welcome that, because it recognises the fact that we are discussing women in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Ms Short: The right hon. Gentleman is probably aware that, rightly, one of the Ulster Unionist Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland objected to the fact that the debate was entitled, "The Position of Women in Britain". That was a slip and a snub that was in no way intended, and we immediately adjusted the title to, "Lives of Women in the United Kingdom".

Mr. Hunt: As I said, I welcome that.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Minister referred to the Cabinet Committee that he chairs. I have asked questions of that Committee, and it appears to meet very infrequently to consider women's issues. I have asked about the issue of women suffering from domestic violence. When will the Government formulate a programme for safe hostels in every part of the country, so that women can be safe from domestic violence? I cannot obtain an answer as to what that Cabinet Committee has been doing about the issue. Perhaps the Minister will tell me.

Mr. Hunt: Let me explain to the hon. Gentleman. The way in which those Committees are referred to has been established by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for the first time ever. The present Prime Minister has recognised publicly the existence of Cabinet Committees, whereas under previous Administrations that was not even made public. He has not only published the identity of Cabinet Committees, but published the membership and the terms of reference. However, he and I follow time-honoured tradition in not revealing to the House the

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nature of the subjects being discussed or the dates of the meetings of the Committees. I believe that it is right to follow that tradition, but let me assure the hon. Gentleman that the work of the Committee continues apace. The correspondence and meetings take place, and indeed we shall meet this month. Let me simply say—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when the Labour party tried to oblige Labour Members of Parliament to elect more women to the shadow Cabinet, one fewer was elected and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) lost her seat, but the Leader of the Opposition ignored the vote and simply appointed her regardless?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The artificiality of positive discrimination can often have the opposite effect. I take this opportunity to welcome the Labour party's change of policy, which is illustrated by the motion. It has at last dropped its idea of having a Ministry dedicated to women's issues.

For some time, the Opposition have demanded a separate Ministry for women, but their current proposals look remarkably like the arrangements that the Prime Minister introduced in 1992. It has taken the Opposition some time to catch up, but I am very glad to see that they are getting there. I welcome their change of policy and I am glad that Opposition Members do not deny it.

I therefore invite the Opposition to take another giant step forward and explain to the House why, of 68 general secretaries of trade unions affiliated with the Trades Union Congress, only four are women. In telling almost everyone under the sun what he or she should be doing to improve equality of opportunity, the hon. Member for Ladywood unaccountably omitted to proffer advice to the trade unions on that point. I hope that some of the later Opposition speakers in the debate will make good that omission.

Ms Short: I listed a series of our major institutions that have that deficiency, and the trade union movement was included in that list. It has been taking major steps to increase the representation of women—perhaps the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) will contain herself—on trade union executives and among senior officials. My union, Unison, has committed itself to the principle of proportionality. It believes that the officers and representatives at every level should reflect the number of women members. Clearly, a generation of trade union general secretaries are male and a generation of women are waiting to take over when the present secretaries reach retirement age.

Mr. Hunt: I am glad that the hon. Lady took the opportunity to set out her policy on that point. I hope that there will be some progress in the very important area of representation by general secretaries.

I hope that the Opposition are not confusing gender politics with gesture politics. Let us not forget that what really counts, in this as in any other area of policy, is practical action all year round, which leads to measurable progress. The Government have taken action and we are making good progress.

We have the figures to prove that. In the past 10 years, the number of women in employment has increased by 1,369,000. There has been a 14 per cent. increase in the number of women working full time and a 19 per cent. increase in the number of women working part time. The proportion of women in the labour force has been increasing and that trend is set to continue. As the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church)—who is not in the Chamber at present—said when she introduced her ten-minute Bill, women will account for 1.2 million of the projected total rise of 1.5 million in the labour force over the next decade.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I would like the right hon. Gentleman to take credit for the fact that, because his Government have done away with so many of the heavy manufacturing jobs in society, almost inevitably more women are entering the work force in low-paid part-time jobs, because that is the only alternative form of employment that his Government intend to encourage.

Mr. Hunt: Although, for decades, there has been a progressive decline in manufacturing employment, particularly at the heavy end, in the past three months, manufacturing employment has increased by more than 30,000. I believe that that very welcome development is largely due to the Government's policies.

The proportion of women in the labour force has been increasing and that trend is set to continue. Women are also getting better pay. In 1970, before the Equal Pay Act, women's full-time average earnings were 63 per cent. of men's. By April last year, they had reached almost 80 per cent. of men's and the gap has closed in each of the past six years. Men's real terms earnings have gone up over the past 10 years. The figures show simply that women's earnings have been rising faster.

Together with the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Equal Pay Act provides a full legislative framework second to none in the European Union to combat and deter sex discrimination and to provide protection against sexual harassment.

Of course, legislation is not the answer to everything and the Government are taking many practical steps to promote the advancement of women. I have seen that at first hand, as Secretary of State for Wales and then as Secretary of State for Employment, before taking on my current responsibilities.

As the hon. Member for Ladywood will know, while at the Welsh Office I introduced a programme called "Chwarae Teg", which is Welsh for fair play. "Chwarae Teg" is the model for "Fair Play for Women", the joint initiative between the Government and the Equal Opportunities Commission that I had the pleasure to launch almost a year ago with Kamlesh Bahl, the chairwoman of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

The Equal Opportunities Commission continues to play a vital role in ensuring progress on women's issues. The Government do not always agree with the views and actions of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which properly and keenly guards its independence. I have no hesitation, however, in paying tribute to the work of the commission and its many lasting achievements.

"Chwarae Teg" has demonstrated that a consortium approach to tackling the barriers facing women really can work well. Under "Fair Play for Women", a consortium has been set up in each of 10 English regions. I wish those consortiums well and they have already got off to a very good start.

There is a huge amount of activity taking place all over the country this week to mark International Women's Day. The London "Fair Play" consortium is hosting a meeting to get across the good business reasons for improving labour market opportunities for women. The west midlands consortium is supporting pilot workshops for personal and career development and the Yorkshire and Humberside consortium is providing financial and promotional support to the university of Huddersfield and its "Women into Technology and Science" course.

As Cabinet Minister with responsibility for science, I attach great importance to promoting the participation of women in science, engineering and technology. That is why, at the end of last year, I set up a women's development unit in the Office of Science and Technology, which is already working on a number of imaginative new projects with partners in the field.

I listened carefully to what hon. Member for Dagenham said earlier in introducing her ten-minute Bill and to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), warning about changing attitudes, but there are a number of important initiatives. For example, the unit is funding a special high-profile event at the science museum on the relationship of women to information technology, which will be linked to a planned exhibition on the information super-highway. Later this month, I shall be speaking at a reception to mark the National Council for Educational Technology's new project on attracting girls to information technology.

Of course, this is not exclusively Government business. The private sector initiative, "Women in Technology", encourages women to enter or return to careers in information technology. Over the past three or four years, it has organised 3,500 workshops for employers and a pretty well-established database for women returners.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend is moving from Government intervention to other forms of intervention, but may I draw to his attention one discrepancy that his Committee may like to consider? It may relate to the change in the title of the debate as it concerns the discrepancy between abortion laws in Northern Ireland and Britain.

As my right hon. Friend is probably well aware, abortion is governed by the Abortion Act 1967. That Act does not apply to Northern Ireland. As a result, there are underground and back-street abortions in Northern Ireland and women have to come to Great Britain to get abortions. Will my right hon. Friend consider the difference between the two jurisdictions?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend raises an issue on which strong views are held in Northern Ireland.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: And here.

Mr. Hunt: And right across the United Kingdom, of course. I shall bring my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and we shall respond.

My unit is working with Opportunity 2000 to produce a joint brochure targeted at employers of scientists and engineers in universities, Government and industry. It will use case studies to highlight the benefits to employers of family-friendly working practices.

The Government have supported the employer-led Opportunity 2000 from day one, and four years later, 28 Government Departments and agencies are involved. As a large employer, the Government recognise the need to take a lead in promoting opportunities for women. For more than 10 years, we have had a programme of action for women in the civil service. I shall shortly launch a report that sets out the progress made over that period.

There is plenty of good news. The proportion of women at executive level has risen from 29 per cent. to 47 per cent. The proportion at higher executive level has risen from 14 per cent. to more than 22 per cent. At senior executive level, the proportion has more than doubled, from 6.4 per cent. to 15 per cent. The proportion of women at assistant secretary level, or grade 5—a senior management and policy grade—has doubled, from 6.6 per cent. to 13.3 per cent.

In the top three grades, nearly 10 per cent. are women, and a formal benchmark figure has been published, that by the year 2000, 15 per cent. of people in the top three grades are expected to be women. There is still a long way to go, but we have made steady and clear progress, and I see no reason for not meeting our future targets.

I am pleased to say that the Cabinet Office has a particularly good record on women's issues. A career break system allows individuals to take up to five years' unpaid special leave. At grade 5, the Cabinet Office tops the table of Government Departments, with women at grade 5 comprising 35 per cent. of staff.

The Government are committed to increasing the number of public appointments held by women. They hold 30 per cent. of Government-appointed posts, compared with 23 per cent. in 1991. Nearly half last year's appointments were of women. That shows what can be achieved by a positive approach—not falling back on some system of artificial quotas, which we all know to be unsatisfactory and which risks devaluing women's achievements.

That is being realised in the United States and—who knows—Labour may realise it one day, instead of undermining the status of some of its women electoral candidates in selection contests that are a million miles away from providing equality of opportunity for the sexes.

Opportunity 2000 is about not quotas but individual employers developing and rewarding their employees according to their merits, and addressing the factors that may prevent women achieving their full potential. There are 275 members of Opportunity 2000, employing 25 per cent. of the country's work force. Opportunity 2000's third-year report highlighted the range of measures being taken by employers to address directly factors that are holding women back.

Opportunity 2000 found that 58 per cent. of member organisations offer job share arrangements, 60 per cent. offer flexible hours, 23 per cent. offer the option of working from home, 25 per cent. offer contracts linked to school terms, 71 per cent. offer maternity arrangements above the statutory minimum and 67 per cent. offer paternity leave.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): How many offer a seat on the board?

Mr. Hunt: Too few, and I recognise that. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment, with her women's issues working group, is addressing a

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series of problems such as the absence of a proper representation of women at board level. Opportunity 2000 is also directly addressing that problem.

The figures that I have quoted show the extent to which employers are setting their own priorities for action. I do not believe for a moment that new legislation or more interference from Government would help. In fact, since 1979 we have removed many unnecessary restrictions and burdens on employers, which hampered the flexibility of the labour market. As a result, there has been a clear growth in the number of opportunities for flexible working, enabling individuals to balance their professional and domestic responsibilities to the benefit of everyone concerned.

The number of women in work in the European Union increased by 8 million between 1983 and 1991, and 25 per cent., a quarter of that increase—2 million jobs for women—was here in the United Kingdom. We have created the sort of deregulated environment in which employers can create jobs. To reimpose the sort of burdens to which the hon. Member for Ladywood referred would destroy work, particularly the flexible job opportunities that women find most attractive.

The Government are trying to maximise the options available to working parents by increasing child care. In 1993 we launched a £45 million initiative to help expand the provision of out-of-school and holiday child care by around 50,000 places. The funds are being channelled through the training and enterprise councils and the local enterprise councils. More than 13,000 places were created in the first 18 months and another 9,000 are already in the pipeline throughout the country.

Those new places build on what was already a much improved framework. Day nursery provision more than doubled between 1983 and 1993 to almost 134,000 places in all. There are two and a half times more registered child minders than there were 10 years ago and the total is now almost 300,000. Nine out of every 10 three and four-year-olds attend some form of child care provision.

The hon. Lady mentioned that in October last year the Government introduced a new disregard for child care in family credit, worth up to £28 per family per week. That is set to help some 150,000 families, including 50,000 women who are expected to be able to take up work as a result of that change.

The Government do not believe that the taxpayer should subsidise child care costs across the board, regardless of need. We are targeting children who are most in need and taking action where we can have most impact, for instance in developing out-of-school child care. It is worth recalling that the 1990 British social attitudes survey found that only 6 per cent. of mothers who were not in employment gave the cost of child care as one of the main reasons.

Ms Short: The right hon. Gentleman has just referred to the disregard for the cost of child care introduced by the Government, which they expect to provide some 150,000 child care places. In answer to a recent parliamentary question I was told, speaking from memory, that about 7,800 child care places were being provided under the scheme. Can the Minister explain why the result appears to be so much less than the promised figure that he has just quoted?

Mr. Hunt: I think that the hon. Lady is confused. The new disregard for child care in family credit, which is worth up to £28 per family per week, was set to help some 150,000 families, including 50,000 women who are expected to be able to take up work as a result of the change. Those are the correct figures, which I stand by.

I take pride in that, because the Government want to create the right conditions for women to have access to work, and the right conditions for women to have access to education and training. We are committed to ensuring that there are training opportunities that address the specific needs of women. Training and enterprise councils are required to set out an equal opportunities strategy with a plan for implementation and a procedure for monitoring progress. The Department of Employment has also asked TECs to report on the anticipated numbers of female participants in training for work and youth training in 1994-95. About half the places in further and higher education are taken up by women and many courses have flexible attendance arrangements to fit in with individual needs. I greatly welcome that.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Perhaps the reason why many women are not benefiting from the disregard for child care is that £28 a week comes nowhere near the full cost of child care. That is why many women still have to rely on informal carers, particularly when they are taking up employment. If the Government really want to help, they should look realistically at child care opportunities and help for women who want to go back to work. The present arrangements are not realistic for most women.

Mr. Hunt: I am glad that the hon. Lady did not challenge my figure of 50,000 women who are expected to be able to take up work as a result of the change. That endorses the reaction to the move of the Chancellor of Exchequer, which was widely to welcome his announcement, which a number of organisations said would have a real impact. The figures show that.

Ms Short: This may not be the best way of getting to the bottom of the matter, but the Minister has just said to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) that he was glad that she did not challenge his figures. I have here the figure given to me in answer to a parliamentary question, which states that only 7,180 families are in receipt of the disregard for child care in family credit and 35 per cent. of them receive less than £10 per week. Will the Minister explain the difference between the figure of 150,000 that he claimed today and that which the Government stated previously?

Mr. Hunt: It is simply that the new disregard was introduced only last year, in the way that I have said. I understand that the latest figure is that 10,500 families are currently receiving help. That is the figure at January 1995. I stand by the fact that the disregard will help some 150,000 families.

Ms Short: In the longer term.

Mr. Hunt: Of course in the longer term, as the disregard is increasingly introduced. There is no dispute between us. Let the hon. Lady at least acknowledge that

the disregard received a wide welcome. Already 10,500 families are receiving help and it is anticipated that 150,000 will do so in the longer term.

Where the Government see clear evidence of a problem, they take action. I give one example. Last month, I announced additional funding to the Royal Society for the new Dorothy Hodgkin fellowships. They will be targeted at top-class scientists who have just completed their PhD—a time when, as "The Rising Tide" report showed, many women are lost to science. That is a step in the right direction.

There is no question but that in the past women who wanted or needed to work often got a raw deal. But during the past 10 to 15 years, the Government have taken action on a broad front to change that. The future looks promising. In our schools, girls are responding to the challenges that they face. They are outperforming boys in science subjects at GCSE level, breaking down those old stereotypes. As the benefits of the national curriculum work through, I expect to see young women coming through ever more strongly at A-level and in our university system.

Combine the Government's education policies—a crucial fact is that we are getting the macro-economic conditions right for growth and job creation—with our initiatives in child care, training, regional equal opportunities consortiums and Opportunity 2000, and we have a coherent package of practical measures to help ensure that women in Britain have the chance to realise their potential.

The Conservative party believes in equality of opportunity, not crude attempts to ignore the problem and to try to fix the outcome. Today's Labour party, however, is a prisoner to political correctness, blowing along willingly with every fad and whim. In its PC mania, Labour will compromise even the principle of equality before the law. It even plans a network of PC thought police throughout central Government and, no doubt, its proposed new regional governments, too.

When I came to the House 19 years ago, the Labour party may have been pretty incompetent, but it still stood not too far away from the mainstream of British—

Mrs. Dunwoody: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a convention of the House that Ministers of the Crown and members of the Opposition refer to themselves as Her Majesty's Government or Her Majesty's Opposition. There is a developing habit among Ministers of addressing Her Majesty's Opposition as the Labour party. Unless it is now our intention to refer to the Government only as the Conservative party, I hope that we might explain one or two of the conventions of the House to the Minister, as although he may have been here for 19 years, it is obviously not long enough.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have stated repeatedly in recent times that I am becoming greatly concerned about the lack of the common courtesies—on both sides—with which I have grown up in the House. Those courtesies seem to be going out the door. I hope that they will rapidly return.

Mr. Hunt: I listened obediently to the hon. Member for Ladywood, and she referred to the Labour party on several occasions during her opening speech. I am not too sure about the point, but, of course, I respect what you said, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was merely saying that, when I came to the House 19 years ago, the Labour party was pretty incompetent, but it was not far away from the mainstream of British common sense. But ever since then, I have watched the Labour party move inexorably into an ideological cul-de-sac of trendy posturing and political correctness, while the Government—not the Opposition—make steady progress in improving opportunities for women, indeed for everyone. Labour's fixation with window dressing on the outskirts of town just grows more embarrassing and I urge the House to reject the Opposition's sham motion and approve the Government's amendment.

4.51 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I find debates on gender inequality worrying, particularly in this place with its 91 per cent. masculinity. There seems to be a consensus on both sides of the House in that everyone agrees that gender inequality is something that they do not like and that it should not exist in society. Everyone says that they have never practised discrimination and that they are working very hard to achieve gender equality.

Complacency is added to hypocrisy by the insistence that the situation is getting better all the time. There is an assumption that the liberating effect of the combination of washing machines, contraception and Sunday shopping will lead inevitably to the greater involvement of women in positions of power, influence and wealth. That makes me feel profoundly uneasy, and I feel considerable disquiet about the analysis of what the future holds.

There was extreme complacency again today, writ large in the Government's submission to the United Nations conference on women, to be held in Peking. The number of women in the judiciary has increased from 4.8 per cent. to 7.8 per cent.—marvellous. The number of women police officers is up from 9 per cent. to 13 per cent.—marvellous. We heard today that in the top three grades of the civil service 10 per cent. of the posts are held by women—which means that 90 per cent. are still held by men.

Those figures increasingly give me cause to worry, for three reasons. First, the facts spelt out by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short)—and, indeed, the facts spelt out by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about improvements—serve only to highlight the imbalance which still exists. It is true that only 2.8 per cent. of senior managers and only 3.7 per cent. of members of company boards are women. There is an incredible imbalance in the positions of power and influence.

Secondly, every suggestion that is made in the House to build on the progress that we are told is being made is met with implacable political hostility from Conservative Members. A major measure such as the introduction of a minimum wage would clearly affect women employees in this country for the good, because three out of four people affected by the Government's abolition of the wages councils were women. A vast majority of women would be affected by the implementation of a minimum wage; they are the people who would mainly feel the benefit of that change. Yet that is one of the causes of discord between Conservative and Labour Members.

Even a minor measure is met with implacable hostility—for example, the Bill that I presented this afternoon to extend to adoptive mothers the same

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maternity rights as are given to natural mothers, although it would possibly have added only 0.5 per cent. to the overall maternity bill. When a minor amendment was tabled to the employment legislation last year, it was met with implacable hostility and thrown out, leaving couples in my constituency to live on part-time earnings, incredibly badly off, during the bonding period following the adoption of a small child or a baby.

Then there are measures which cost nothing at all, such as provision for more openness and insisting that all employers produce gender-based employment statistics about who gets the best opportunities for training in their companies and who gets the best opportunities for preferment and career development. Without the collation of such information and statistics, there can be no real and permanent progress; yet it is at that point that we meet implacable political hostility to further progress.

Thirdly, I am concerned about hypocrisy and complacency because I do not believe that the improvements are inevitable: I believe that they could go into reverse. Women's suffrage, achieved in 1928, is only a generation behind us. It is only 50 years since the 1945 Labour Government brought in universal health care, state education for all and a universal pension. The drive behind the undoubted changes that have taken place has nothing whatever to do with the practices, thoughts or policies of the present Government and everything to do with democratic changes stemming from the actions that were taken by the Labour Government in 1945.

I believe that the current retreat from democracy to a quango state—the privatisation of public services and utilities and the emphasis on profit, share options and markets rather than on public service—could reverse the changes that have been made. Questions of public provision and collective accountability expose the need for gender equality and other types of equality between citizens.

The national health service is for everyone. A well-funded state education system allows boys and girls to feel that they have equal rights in regard to education. It has taken a generation of children, since comprehensive education became the norm, to bring us to the point at which—as has been rightly pointed out—achievement begins truly to reflect ability. Indeed, girls now outperform boys at every stage from O-levels to university degrees.

Women in their thousands toiled to sign millions of petitions against the increase in value added tax on heating. Women, in particular, feel outraged by the damage caused by the privatisation of our public utilities, and the fact that the bosses are taking the payments for which they have budgeted so carefully. Women who run household budgets know to their cost the difficulties involved in making those payments and they are personally outraged at the knowledge that their money is paying for multi-million pound salaries, share options and dividends.

In the past 10 or 15 years, local democracy—democracy in local government—has enabled councils to recognise the problem caused in their communities by gender inequality. They have taken the lead in monitoring the position, collecting figures, launching positive action projects and offering women enhanced training facilities. They have opened up the job market to women in local democratic institutions, pioneered job sharing schemes, and so on. We welcome the changes in the civil service that the Chancellor has described, but it should be remembered that they were pioneered in the public sector.

Having sat on the board of the Sheffield development corporation and also been a member of Sheffield city council, I observed a startling change between the two. The other members of the board exhibited the utmost complacency and ignorance in relation to anything to do with equal opportunities in jobs and training. They either treated such matters as a joke, or admitted that they knew nothing about them and had not heard of such practices in their private sector institutions.

More recently, I served on the Select Committee on the Environment and noted the obvious surprise when it was pointed out that only three members of the board of the Housing Corporation were women. That did not reflect the interests of housing association tenants. The same applies to many quango appointments: it is commonly felt that a retired business man is an appropriate appointee, because he will know about business and will therefore be more able than a woman to look after quango institutions or privatised utilities.

So although changes have been outlined ably this afternoon, the move from open competition for civil service jobs to head hunting and the appointment of Ministers' friends is symptomatic of a return to the old boy network. A drift back to the two-tier education system and the two-tier health service could well take the next generation back to the days before 1945 when the welfare state legislation brought about major improvements which have eventually found their way into our lives.

I fear that the basic instincts of an unchecked society are dominated by hierarchies. There is a tendency towards elitism, establishments and exploitation of the majority by the minority. We can never assume that equality of opportunity will happen automatically in any society. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's speech was riddled with inconsistency; having claimed that the Government had taken action, he said in the next breath that they were succeeding because they had allowed no action to be taken. He seemed to be saying that they had allowed deregulation to take place so that equality could take its natural course. But that is not the way of the world, or the way of British society.

Opposition Members believe that only through constant vigilance, constant monitoring and—yes—constant intervention by a good, accountable Government can fairness and equality flourish. As soon as they begin to flourish, the development of a sound economic base, a reduction in crime and higher standards of education and skills will follow. On that the House can agree wholeheartedly and, I hope, achieve consensus today.

5.7 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I begin with a quotation which, I believe, sets a background for much of what will be said today:

> "Can it be pretended that women who manage a property or conduct a business—who pay rates and taxes often to a large amount, and frequently from their own earnings—many of whom are responsible heads of families and some of whom, in the capacity of schoolmistresses, teach more than a great many of the male electors have ever learnt—are not capable of a function of which every male householder is capable?".

That was said in the House by John Stuart Mill when he moved the first women's suffrage amendments to the 1867 Reform Bill. I am sure that it was true then, and certain that it is very true today.

The topic of today's debate provides an opportunity to speak about the whole spectrum of women's issues. I would like to discuss many of those issues in depth, but time will not allow me to do so. I shall begin by highlighting the aims of the United Kingdom Federation of Business and Professional Women. In the 1940s, that federation of women's clubs had a number of positive objectives: they were to awaken and encourage in business and professional women a realisation of their responsibilities in their own country and in world affairs; to facilitate effective co-operation between business and professional women throughout the world; to raise the standards of education and training for business and professional women; and to work for the removal of sex discrimination in opportunities for employment, promotion and remuneration.

Here we are, 50 years later. What has happened since those aims were first laid down? It is interesting to analyse what has been achieved in the past 50 years; I shall look at that in a moment. What is certain is that, whatever progress has been made, much remains to be done. When women look at women's issues, they must never be satisfied with progress if they are permanently to believe in equality with men.

I believe that we often achieve equality with men, sometimes to the annoyance of the men. We often more than equal them; we out-achieve them. That has been proved by many girls and students in schools, colleges and universities. What do the men do then? I think that they move the goalposts and we then have to start the game all over again. We must never be satisfied with progress.

What have we achieved towards those aims of almost half a century ago and what needs to be done? Have women realised their responsibilities in their own country and in world affairs, perhaps by effective co-operation between women throughout the world? Women have, I suggest, always recognised their responsibilities, both here and throughout the world. The United Kingdom has not always given the lead. Certainly, in terms of women's suffrage we did not. On 28 November 1893, New Zealand women flocked to the polls as they gained the vote, and obviously made good use of it.

I recall that, at the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in New Delhi in 1993, Dr. Najma Heptulla presented a paper entitled "Women, a Saga of Struggle". She spoke about the meeting of women parliamentarians which preceded the IPU conference. The meeting took place on the day of rest for the conference. It was Sunday and all the men had a day off while the women went to work on what they wanted to discuss. Dr. Heptulla also said that, despite the pressures of societies and systems, women had, in different periods of history, emerged at the forefront and had proved their mettle, many in this country and many in other parts of the world. We can look back to Queen Elizabeth I—what a determined woman she was. We can look back to Queen Victoria and to our own Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. We can look at Benazir Bhutto and we can look back to Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Mrs. Bandaranaike, all of whom were leaders in their countries before we had a woman leader. I recall meeting Lucy Mobuelo, who was the leader of the South African Garment Workers Union. What that lady told us about the work she did in that country at a very difficult time was most encouraging.

There is, of course, always more that needs to be done. While we debate the position of women, we should also spare a thought for the many women throughout the world who do not have the advantages that we have here. We should try, and we should continue to try through our international women's organisations, to improve their daily lives because many of them do not have the advantages and facilities that we have, even though we believe that we can go further.

We must also look at what steps have been taken to raise the standard of education and training for women. We all recognise that education is vital to enable all people to achieve their full potential. It is widely recognised throughout the world that if one educates a woman, one educates the family; we must not forget that.

The number of women in higher education has risen by 100,000 since 1979. The proportion of women to men in the intake to higher education is now almost 50:50. I should like to be able to stand here in a year's time and say that we have passed that 50 per cent. mark. That would truly reflect the proportion of women in this country.

At A-level, girls have a higher success rate than boys, not only in English but in mathematics, physics and technology. At GCSE level, almost 46 per cent. of girls gained five or more passes at grades A to C compared with under 30 per cent. of boys in 1993. I suggest that our school students are making their own way towards the end of their education and the start of their careers.

Ms Short: Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the advantages of women asking for the statistics of achievement to be disaggregated—or, if the *Daily Mail* cannot handle that, broken down by the performance of boys and girls—is that we would see that the performance of boys in school is worryingly bad? Does she agree that equal opportunities mean everyone achieving his or her full potential? Does she agree that it is a priority for education policy to examine why boys seem to be underachieving so badly in school?

Mrs. Peacock: I was going to make that very point. The Government have encouraged choice and diversity in education, allowing parents to choose to send their children to single-sex schools which, on average, produce better academic results for girls. I was going to go on to say that it is, however, worrying, no matter how pleased we are at how well the girls are doing in school, to note that boys are not achieving so much and that we should find out why. Are they giving up because they see the girls doing better? I had sons and not daughters. I think that girls doing well helps to keep boys' noses to the grindstone. One of my sons benefited from that. However, we need to examine seriously why boys appear in some areas to have given up.

We need to encourage women who are now working, but who did not have the opportunity to gain qualifications at school, to become part of national vocational qualification training schemes and to take other training opportunities that will give them greater confidence in their future. This is happening to quite an extent in our textile industry where there have been specific schemes to train men and women between the ages of 25 and 35 who left school with no qualifications.

[Mrs. Peacock]

Through NVQs, those people have been able to achieve a qualification and, often, to move on with promotion through their company and to take a more responsible job. We are all told nowadays that people need a certificate of competence, whatever that might be, to say that they can perform certain tasks. That is one of the great moves forward that we have made with NVQs.

We must consider steps to remove sex discrimination in opportunities for employment, promotion and remuneration. I do not believe that the position is as gloomy as it is always painted. The United Kingdom has the second highest proportion of women in work; Denmark has the highest. Women here account for 45 per cent. of the labour force and 12.1 million women are either working or seeking work.

The number of women in self-employment has risen by almost 80 per cent. since 1981 and women account for one in four of the self-employed. It is sometimes said that women who find that the glass ceiling, or the shutter, whichever one likes to call it, descends on them then decide that they will set up and run their own company. They are extremely successful in doing that and we should encourage more of them. However, we still want the many capable women in businesses to continue to push at the proverbial glass ceiling to ensure that it rises as the women rise throughout their careers.

Forty-five per cent. of women work part time. Between spring 1984 and 1994, there was an 18 per cent. increase in part-time employment. Part-time employment is often derided as not being good or sensible employment. However, I must tell the House that many women in my constituency want to work part time because it fits in with their family commitments and with having children at school. In Fox's biscuit factory, women can work twice a year—in the run-up to Christmas, when the company takes on lots of extra staff, and in the other peak period. Those women know that they have regular work each year for so many weeks. They find that that is ideal and that they can cope with that and a family. The work at Fox's is not slave labour: the women pack high-quality biscuits and high-quality goods; they have good training and the company has good working practices. This very good company looks after its workers, as many of us like to see. All part-time employment may not be quite as good; part-time work at Fox's is good. As an employer of more than 2,000 and sometimes 2,500 people in my area, the company is a most important employer. If women and, occasionally, some men could not work part time, the company would have to install machines. Before long, it will be possible to pack high-quality delicate biscuits by machinery. At the moment, that is not quite possible. Certainly, Batley would lose a huge amount of employment if it were decided to put machinery in to do that packing.

Since the Prime Minister launched the Opportunity 2000 initiative in 1991, company membership has more than doubled, and it now covers more than 25 per cent. of the work force. There is still a long way to go. We need to keep pushing such initiatives along and never sit back and think that we have arrived and achieved our goal, because we have not. The public appointments unit, of which many of us have been critical over many years, reported that in 1993 women took 40 per cent. of all new appointments to public bodies. That is certainly an improvement, as it was something like 30 per cent. in 1989. We also need to move that forward. I am sure that, by 1996, 50 per cent. of public appointments will be filled by women, which will reflect the number of women in the United Kingdom.

The Government have helped to create a more flexible environment for working women, especially by the provision of workplace nurseries, which attract tax relief, and by introducing a child care allowance worth up to £28 a week for those on family credit. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) said that that allowance was not worth much and did not buy very much. It may not be as much as many of us would like, but it is certainly £28 a week more than was available at one time. It may be that such help has to be given bit by bit to ensure that the country can afford all the schemes that we would like.

Dr. Lynne Jones: May I point out to the hon. Lady that although, in theory, £28 is available, many women are not eligible and many families do not receive that £28 because there is a maximum limit on family credit? As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) mentioned, most receive less than £10 a week. That does not go far enough, realistically, to help women with child care expenses.

Mrs. Peacock: I have been looking at who benefits and by how much in my constituency and, at the end of my inquiries, I shall report to the Minister on how effective I think that the allowance is. We were told that there was an opportunity for those on family credit to receive £28 a week. I am very interested, as always, to see how that works in practice.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I, too, was going to raise the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones). I am delighted to hear that the hon. Lady will look into the matter. The whole House will be interested to hear the results of her inquiry. Was she, too, slightly puzzled when the Chancellor said that the child care allowance disregard was to be gradually introduced? I thought that the House had been told that it was introduced already and was available. I was slightly surprised. I wonder if the hon. Lady was surprised, too.

Mrs. Peacock: My understanding of what my right hon. Friend said was that the disregard had been introduced but it had not been taken up all at once. As I understood it, the take-up would be more gradual as more people entered the system. I shall also look at that aspect. If the hon. Gentleman had been here a little longer, he would know that I am always fairly thorough in looking at how Government policies affect the people whom I represent. The disregard will be the subject of another one of my inquiries. I may not publish my results, but the Minister will certainly get them.

It is a fact that women in Britain enjoy the longest period of maternity absence of any country in the European Union and one of the longest periods of paid maternity leave—18 weeks. Married women have independent tax status and may now choose whether to share the married couples allowance with their husbands, thanks to Conservative tax reforms in 1990 and 1993. Many of us campaigned for many years to have the right to be taxed separately. Although I do not mind my husband paying my tax, I would like to know on what I

am assessed. As the House may imagine, he does not especially like to pay tax for me, but we have every right to be totally independent if that is what we wish.

Yorkshire, a very fine county, part of which I represent and where I was born and bred, recognises achievement, particularly in women. Each year, the Yorkshire women of achievement awards result in a great gathering. They reward achievement in all walks of life—not only public figures but, often, people who have made great achievements in their own life, perhaps connected to their family. Those awards are a very good way in which to highlight much of the work that is done behind the scenes by women. We also have the Yorkshire woman of the year award. We are not totally biased, however, because there is a Yorkshire man of the year award as well, so we have equality in that respect.

We all need to recognise that women of whatever age or background need to have some choice in what they do. I do not believe that many of the young women whom I see in schools and colleges in my constituency and further afield need quotas. They have many more opportunities now and they are very determined. When I go along to listen to what they have to say, it never fails to amaze me how capable they are. In public-speaking competitions, they stand up, debate and win prizes. I do not believe that they want quotas. They do not want places saved for them. I certainly do not want quotas. I know from my experience over the past 12 years in the House that, if there were quotas and I turned up as a quota woman, my colleagues would say that they did not need to listen to my comments because I was here only because they had saved me a place. That is not the type of position or job that I would ever wish to have. I wish to be present on my own merits and, therefore, to be taken seriously when I contribute to a debate.

It is true, of course, that although we would like women to have choice, some need to work to help the family budget. That is nothing new; it has always been so. Women go to work, not only to occupy themselves and to pursue careers but to help to keep the family and provide some of life's necessities. It would be nice if that did not happen, but it does, it always has and I cannot see a total end to it. The part-time earnings brought into the family budget by many women are most welcome.

Some women will choose to stay at home and look after their small children and we should recognise and applaud their choice. We should not devalue the role of motherhood or the woman who wants to say at home and look after her children. Being with a child in the first few years of his or her life is probably the most important job of a mother. We should, therefore, welcome that choice and put a high value on it.

Of course we need to see more women in Parliament, but I cannot see 300 of our colleagues laying down their arms, as it were, and saying, "Do have my seat." That will not happen. When I first came into the House in 1983, there were just 23 women. It was a very low percentage—I think, the lowest ever. There are now 62 women in the House. In just over a decade, we have almost trebled the number and moved on. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) said, next time, watch this space. We cannot wait. Even this House has moved on from Churchill's comment when Nancy Astor arrived in Parliament. He said it was

"like being found naked in the bathroom with nothing but a sponge to protect you".

I hope that hon. Members do not take a similar view.

Mr. Ottaway: I do not wish to disagree with my hon. Friend, but will she correct me if I am wrong—perhaps some Labour Members may correct me—in thinking that when the Labour party put forward positive discrimination in favour of women candidates, a committee was set up to decide what was a woman and it decided that, in fact, it was someone who lived as a woman? That of, course, would include someone who dresses as a woman and did not rule out transvestites. What would the reaction be if a transvestite were to encroach on such matters, as is possibly envisaged by the Labour party?

Mrs. Peacock: I am afraid that I do not know anything at all about that.

Ms Short: Just for the record, I do not know where the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) read that. There was never such a committee.

Mr. Ottaway: In the *Observer*.

Ms Short: The hon. Gentleman should not believe everything he reads in the newspapers. I can assure him that there was never such a committee or such a judgment.

Mrs. Peacock: We must recognise that women who wish to become Members of Parliament will decide at different times in their lives when it is right to do that. Some young women might decide in school, as men do, that they wish to pursue a career in Parliament. Some will become Members as young women before they are married. Some will come in after they are married. Some may become Members before they have children, while some may come to the House afterwards.

Shortly after the 1983 general election, an article in *The Times* asked why the average age of the new male Member of the House was 31 or 33 while the average age of women Members was 45. The reason for that age difference is obvious. The majority of the women who became Members then came to the House after having children. They allowed their children to reach a sensible age and then decided that they wanted to do something else.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Is the hon. Lady aware that all the studies in schools of schoolchildren reveal that the expectations of the jobs that boys and girls will have retain incredible gender imbalances? Virtually no girls at school think that they will become politicians. Most girls leave school thinking that they are going to be nurses, teachers, or part of the caring professions. It is the boys who see themselves as becoming politicians. That position has not changed significantly.

Mrs. Peacock: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but I do not believe most of those surveys. From my experience of talking to young people in schools, and particularly of talking to girls, I have found a totally different approach. Many of those young people are talking about doing quite different things. Although not many of them are talking about becoming Members of Parliament, there is an interest in politics. I am often invited to speak on that subject in schools in my constituency and further afield. I shall visit a school on Friday to talk to girls in a very male-dominated environment in an industrial area. It was felt that those girls have no role models. They wanted

[Mrs. Peacock]

someone to talk to them about women performing jobs other than those which they might traditionally have performed.

I did not have any hopes or thoughts about becoming a Member of Parliament when I was at school. That desire developed over a much longer period through involvement in other things. Perhaps many young women will become Members as a result of that kind of progression instead of starting off with a desire to become a Member. It is our job as lady Members to encourage girls to think otherwise. We cannot do that through surveys. We must have personal contact and talk to girls in schools. We must listen to what they have to say.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Obviously, a fair number of hon. Members become Members at a relatively early age and stay for a long time. There is also a fair amount of turnover. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is just as important that people who may spend two or three Parliaments serving in the House feel that they can become Members for the first time in their 60s, 50s or 40s, just as much as in their 30s? We should not have an agist approach to the effect that it is better to be an ex-Member at 45 than to be one at 65 or 75.

Mrs. Peacock: I could not agree more. My advice to any young man or woman who wants to become a Member is that he or she should go away, get some experience of life, do various jobs outside so that that person has a little more idea about what he or she is talking about, and then become a Member at 40 or 45 because there is still time to bring outside experience to the House. Although many young people are becoming Members, they are single-minded and just want to be Members of Parliament. I am not sure whether we want to see a House full of such Members. We want a variety of interests and ages and also a great variety of backgrounds.

In a debate such as this, it is very easy to stand up and make a great noise about the terrible position of women in Britain. I do not believe that the position is so terrible. Having travelled in one or two countries abroad, I am always pleased to come home to the advantages and the position in the United Kingdom, as opposed to that enjoyed by some of our friends abroad.

The position of most women in Britain today is much better than it was 20, 30 or 40 years ago. We now have organisations like the women's network where women get together and discuss professional issues and any other issues that women may wish to get together to discuss. Ten years ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) and I set up an old girls' network. Having become Members of this place, we decided that it ticked on the old boys' network. Over a cup of coffee, we decided that if we wished to survive, we should set up an old girls' network and we unashamedly did just that.

We now have a group of women from all over the United Kingdom—from the north of Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and elsewhere—who meet two or three times a year. It is a non-political organisation. The women welcome the opportunity to get together, to discuss and to hand out business cards. Our old girls' network is very successful. We now have a mailing list of 460 women of all ages and backgrounds throughout the United Kingdom. It is our responsibility to encourage others, in particular the younger women and others who may not want to come to Parliament but who want to take a leading role in public life generally.

We must consider women's issues with a more balanced approach. We must compare and contrast the position of women in Britain with that of women elsewhere in the world. Although there is much to be done, we have a pretty good story to tell. We must consider what has been achieved and I have tried to do that today. We must look positively at what needs to be done and I believe that I have highlighted one or two areas in respect of which we could move forward.

As women, we must now decide how to achieve all our aims and objectives, whatever they may be. I am quite sure that we all have different aims and objectives. We must begin by being very constructive. However, if that fails, as some of my colleagues will know, I am not against a little bit of militancy. One of my greatest regrets is that I was not born in a slightly earlier age so that I, too, could have been a suffragette and helped in the fight for votes for women.

I am not sure whether I would have been as brave as some of those suffragettes. Without their bravery and their actions—and although I am sure that we disapprove of bricks being thrown through windows—we would not be where we are today. We have a lot for which to thank the suffragettes.

I have always believed in standing up and fighting for what I believe is the positive way forward. I have been a member of the Business and Professional Women's Club for 30 years. Although the club does not see very much of me, I keep in touch. I believe that the club's aims and objectives will benefit all women, not just one particular branch of women. We are talking about support and education for women.

As I have said, we owe much to many brave women in the past. However, I also believe that women today must march onwards together, as much as possible, in the cause of our own future.

5.37 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I join the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) in paying tribute to the suffragettes. I am pleased that she paid that tribute, and I am sure that her feelings are echoed on the Opposition Benches.

In addition to the very well known women like the Pankhursts, women all over the country from various social classes were involved in the suffragette movement. We would do women a service if we did more to preserve their memory and to educate girls—and often ourselves—about the achievements and efforts of the suffragettes. For example, the first suffragette in Preston was Edith Rigby. An excellent book entitled "My Aunt Edith" describes her battles. I use the word "battles" advisedly, because battle is what she did. It is very important to carry forward those memories, but we do not do enough of it.

There are two problems in women's employment. One is that it is too narrowly based. Reference has already been made to the need for women to cast their nets wider. Girls should be encouraged to consider jobs that are not traditionally women's jobs. All hon. Members would endorse that.

The other problem is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) said, traditional women's jobs such as nursing and teaching—the legitimate ambitions for girls—are undervalued. One thing that we must do to improve the position of women is enhance the value which society places on such jobs. They are honourable callings. I should not like, in our eagerness for girls to go into other jobs and other aspects of decision making, to connive in the undervaluing of teaching, nursing and other caring professions.

Mrs. Helen Jackson *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Wise: I see my hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough nodding vigorously.

I wish to concentrate on the problems of unemployment, under-employment and low pay. Official figures show that, apparently, fewer than a quarter of unemployed people are women. That is a gross misrepresentation of unemployment among women. Women's unemployment is not properly counted. Each of the 20 or so changes in the method of counting unemployment has worked to hide women and their problems in obtaining jobs.

Women are much less likely than men to be able to claim benefit. Therefore, they will not be counted. There are strenuous efforts even to prevent women from registering as available for work. Unreasonable requirements are placed on them to forecast child care arrangements in respect of jobs that they have not been offered, the hours of which they do not know, and the place of which they do not know. It is impossible for women who have not been born with second sight to outline child care arrangements when they have not been offered jobs. They are then deprived of the opportunity of registering as available for work.

Women, as well as being more unemployed than we think, are also very much under-employed. By that, I do not mean underworked; under-employment is different. Official figures do not provide information on the extent of under-employment, but thousands of women experience it. For example, women who go back to work after having a family often return to lower-graded and less-skilled work—and, of course, lower-paid work. That is a type of under-employment. Such women are not permitted to use their skills and experience.

There are women who want to work full time but can find only part-time jobs. Women in part-time jobs have found their hours of work being steadily reduced. I endorse the comment of the hon. Member for Batley and Spen that many women want to work part time. I speak as the president and sponsored Member of Parliament for the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. We have many part-time workers in our membership—if we did not, our union would hardly exist. It is not that we are against part-time work.

At one time, women seeking a part-time job might have wanted to work, say, mornings or three days a week. The situation has changed vastly for the worse. Such women find their hours of work being steadily reduced against their will. Whereas, in 1981, 6.5 per cent. of women worked fewer than eight hours a week—they were counted as employed—by 1994 the figure rose to 11.7 per cent. The figure is well on the way to doubling. I do not believe that many of those women prefer to work fewer than eight hours a week. Employers often prefer it, because it cuts employees out of entitlement to employment rights, however long they have worked for the firm.

In 1981, 31.7 per cent. of women worked fewer than 16 hours a week. The figure rose to 52.5 per cent. in 1994. We are talking not about part-time work, which can have a useful part to play and be very popular with women, but about women whose hours of work and wages are being steadily squeezed.

There are also women who are on zero-hours or on-call contracts. They are supposed to be available at the end of a telephone when an employer says, "I want you in tomorrow, because somebody has gone sick." If someone says, "I am afraid I cannot get my child looked after at a minute's notice; I need a week or so to plan," that does not suit the employer, so no work is forthcoming.

I do not call that freedom or flexibility for women. I call it women being at the mercy of employers, who fail to plan their labour needs adequately and properly. It is rather like the system by which employers would say to the dockers in a pen, "I want you, you and you today, and the rest of you go home," except that one now has the dignity of not being in a pen but instead has the expense of providing a telephone. That is part of the process of casualisation, which has resulted in a massive increase in insecure, temporary and casual work.

That is a severe problem for women, and it is reflected in their pay. I do not intend to give tedious lists about what women earn, but there are some striking figures. More than 3 million people earn less than the income tax threshold, and 85 per cent. of them are women.

On 9 February, in answer to a parliamentary question, I was told that, according to the latest available figures—April 1994—3.1 million employees earned more than the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions, over which, of course, contributions are not increased, so those people are in the happy position of paying a lower total rate of tax. Half a million of those fortunate people were women—16 per cent.

The mirror image of that can be seen in the fact that 3.1 million employees earned less than the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. There are 3.1 million people earning above the upper limit and 3.1 million earning below the lower limit, but 2.3 million of the latter are women. That is three quarters of these very low earners, who earn less than £58 a week. Those women are counted as employed, but the result is that they are not eligible for statutory sick pay, statutory maternity pay or main contributory benefits, including pensions. That is a stark example of what happens in respect of women's pay.

I have already said that my trade union is USDAW, of which I am the president. Retailing has borne the brunt of the Government's policies as they have acted to deregulate it completely. The last remaining thread of protection which existed for shop workers for tea breaks and meal breaks and the controls on excessive weekday opening hours have been wiped away.

There are increasingly complex shift patterns associated with extended hours, and it is usually part-time, temporary and casual workers who face the demands arising from the changes, with all the stresses and strains that those put on the individual worker and the family. Those workers have the least protection, and frequently have no protection, under our employment protection laws.

[Mrs. Wise]

Research on low pay conducted by my union has demonstrated that, since the abolition of wages councils, wage rates in former wages councils industries have dropped drastically. USDAW carries out regular surveys of pay rates on offer in jobcentres throughout the country. Recent examples include such jobs as a part-time supermarket cleaner in Hull at £2.05 an hour, a shop assistant in Northampton at £100 for a 40-hour week, and a hairdresser capable of working "to a high standard" in a Rochdale salon at £60 for a 42-hour week.

Those examples are not the most stark. There are examples which are worse, but we do not want to be accused of being completely untypical. Those examples could be seen by any hon. Member going into his or her local jobcentre tomorrow. It would be a good idea if some hon. Members did that. The new earnings survey shows that more than half women checkout operators earn less than £3.60 per hour.

It is true that there are now improved rights for part-time workers. The Government have been dragged kicking, screaming and resisting every inch of the way—they are squeezed between the European Union and the legal judgment of the House of Lords—and have given part-time workers, most of whom are women, some equal employment rights. But in reality, women workers are treated less favourably than male workers. They are not allowed to make the contribution that they would like to make, for themselves, their families or the economy in general.

I should like to mention with great approval the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), which has received its Second Reading. The Bill aims to give carers some rights to have their needs assessed. That is extremely important to women, because three carers in every five are women. Of course all five carers will benefit—the two men as well. It is fair to say that, every time one improves the situation for women, the situation for men—often men who are making an unsung contribution—will also be improved.

Following the welter of all-party support given to my hon. Friend's Bill, I wonder whether there will be the resources to match the rights which are being extended to carers. A veil was drawn over that on Friday, and, while I do not like to disturb the equilibrium of the unaccustomed all-party approval, I must say that the thoughts going through my mind were less than charitable. Government support is given at the stage when further responsibilities are placed on local government, but will the resources be available when they are needed by local government? Will there be all-party support then? I hope so, but I have my doubts.

One reason why caring and caring jobs are undervalued is because women are undervalued. The contribution which carers make to the economy was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West, and probably amounts to £30 billion a year. That is a substantial economic contribution, which could be more than matched by the other contributions made by women's unpaid work which is not counted as a part of GNP. I am pleased to associate myself with the campaign by my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) for women's unpaid labour to be counted when we are assessing the production of the economy.

The undervaluing of women has turned them into cut-price people, and has meant that their caring and economic role is undervalued. I believe that an essential prerequisite for getting real equality for women in the United Kingdom will be for women to cease to be cut-price people in their work, whether inside or outside the home.

5.55 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): First, I apologise, both to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), for not being here during their opening speeches. I had spoken to Madam Speaker earlier, and I was detained on a matter elsewhere in the House.

I would like to welcome to the Front Bench my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who I am delighted to see will be winding up for the Government. My hon. Friend is a shining example of a mother and business woman who has chosen to change her career to come into this House.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ladywood on securing the debate, which seems to be becoming an annual affair. I remember exchanging blows with her last year during a debate on sex discrimination. It is good that she has been able to persuade her right hon. and hon. Friends to set aside a whole day to debate what I believe is an extremely important subject.

I was a little disappointed that, during International Women's Week, we could not have debated the subject of women on a far wider international motion. I believe that we are very fortunate as women in the United Kingdom. That is not to say that there are not still things to be done on our behalf. I would have liked to see the Members of this House turn their faces outwards to look at the plight of women in less privileged countries.

We have made a lot of progress in this country, much of which has been aided by good, sound Conservative Government legislation, but I would like to raise a matter on which progress has not been made.

I introduced a ten-minute Bill last year which simply asked for the same employment rights to be conferred upon adoptive mothers as are conferred upon mothers who give birth to their children. Adoptive mothers do not have parity with natural mothers. They do not have a statutory right to return to work after the adoptive period, and they do not receive any statutory payment during such an absence.

The condition prevails today, even though an adoptive mother may have paid the same national insurance contributions. I not only introduced a ten-minute Bill on the matter, but raised it on the Adjournment. It is not a party political matter. I would like to thank the hon. Members for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin), for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), all of whom supported my ten-minute Bill last year, together with members of my own party, who also supported the Bill.

Once again, I would like to ask Government Front-Bench Members to level the playing field for adoptive parents, and to introduce amendments to the employment protection legislation.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), who today laid a similar Bill on the Table. We have already been in contact on the matter, and I am proud to have added my name to the list of sponsors. I hope that Ministers will take the request seriously. We are talking about a small group of women who are disadvantaged—a group that provides a service to some of our children and to the country as a whole. Those women actually save the Government money, and I think that they should have equal treatment with natural mothers.

As for the Government's record on legislation benefiting women, the impression often left by the debate surrounding women in this country is that the Tory party at best pays only lip service to women, and at worst does not care at all. However, the reverse is true.

I should have to speak at great length to cover all the measures introduced since 1979 that have benefited women, but three of the most important such changes, which have benefited women directly, have occurred in the tax system. The introduction of independent taxation in 1990, along with the replacement of the married man's allowance, was welcomed both by me and by my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock). It was also welcomed by my husband with some relief, because he no longer had to try to get to grips with my simple—but to him fairly alien—tax affairs.

The provision of tax relief for workplace nurseries also took place in 1990. In 1991, no fewer than 20,000 women took advantage of that measure. In 1988, the reform in the taxation of maintenance payments occurred, so that maintenance was taken out of the tax system today. Those are probably the best known reforms; they are certainly those that are mentioned most often during debates on women's matters.

However, I shall also remind the House of a couple of other reforms introduced by successive Conservative Governments that are equally important, although often forgotten. It was a Conservative Government who in 1979 abolished the married women's half test. That was an additional contribution condition requiring married women to have paid national insurance contributions in at least half the years between marriage and pensionable age.

In November 1994, we introduced the severe disablement allowance, which, unlike its predecessor, was available to married women for the first time on the same terms as other claimants. In April 1990, we introduced the special payment for pre-1973 war widows, who had long campaigned on the basis that they had not benefited from improvements in the armed forces pension scheme. People often forget that it was a Conservative Government who did that.

In 1981, we introduced the British Nationality Act, which for the first time allowed women who were British citizens, whether married or not, to transmit their citizenship automatically to their children born abroad. Before that Act, citizenship could be transmitted only by the father, and then only to legitimate children. It was a Conservative Government who did that, too.

I could go on to talk about the Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983, which established the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, and the Sex Discrimination Act 1986, which removed restrictions on women's hours and times of work. That may have been a controversial measure in some areas, but it is not controversial for the members of staff in this place, many of whom are women, and who support us so admirably throughout our parliamentary year by working some very anti-social hours. I could go on and on, but I do not think now that I need remind the House any more of the commitment of successive Conservative Governments to the cause of women.

I now return to my opening remarks, about how disappointed I was not to be debating women's matters on an internationally framed motion. I wish to remain in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I have given some thought to how to do so, and I have decided to talk about the work of one woman in our Government—Baroness Chalker, at the Overseas Development Administration.

If the Labour party had framed the debate more widely, we could have talked about the women pearl divers in Lesotho whose lives are shortened because of the depths to which they dive, and about the way in which the Women's Institute has helped them. We could have talked about the women of central Africa who walk 15 miles a day to fetch water. I do not believe that any woman in the House walks 15 miles a day for water.

We could also have talked about the women of China who face the dilemma of being allowed to produce only one child. If that first child is a girl, what a terrible decision they have to make. What sort of privation are they forced into?

Dr. Lynne Jones: If the hon. Lady feels so strongly about those issues and about women's lives in the international scene, will she ask her Government to arrange for a debate on them in Government time?

Mrs. Gillan: I thank my friend—I mean, the hon. Lady, although I think of her as my hon. Friend—for that intervention. What she suggests would be a good idea. Perhaps we could both make the point to the Leader of the House during business questions on Thursday. I have not heard many voices from the Opposition Benches calling for a debate on that subject, but it would be an excellent idea. The Opposition have missed an opportunity by not highlighting the plight of women internationally.

Surely we should get our priorities right. Surely we should not gaze at our navels, but should look outwards to see how we can educate and help women in other countries. Baroness Chalker is giving us a formidable lead at the ODA. Indeed, on the front page of the booklet containing the ODA's annual review for 1994, among the aims of the aid programme, she specifically includes:

"Promote the status of women".

In many developing countries, women are usually the poorest and work longer hours gathering bare essentials. They often have the sole responsibility for bringing up children. In 1993-94, the ODA almost doubled the sum spent on projects specifically aimed at women. It supported the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and the Aga Khan Rural Support Project.

In the Pacific region, the ODA supports a judicial, legal and rights education programme aimed at providing training for women and encouraging them to go into a profession dominated by men. In Africa, it supports the work of African women's organisations in educating families and their children, especially about the problems resulting from female genital mutilation, which still occurs throughout the world, and which I find abhorrent.

[Mrs. Gillan]

Baroness Chalker is taking direct action on desperately urgent projects. Many other women's organisations in this country—for example, the Women's Institute—also choose to direct some of their efforts abroad. I should like us to turn our eyes to those women. We must continue to make progress here. It is much more important to try to empower women who are so severely disadvantaged in underprivileged countries, when we in the United Kingdom are so privileged today.

Yes, we still have further to go, but as women, especially as women in the House of Commons, we have a strong message to take abroad. I hope that Baroness Chalker will continue to carry that message, and I hope that those on the Opposition Front Bench will support me in looking for more help for women in other countries.

6.8 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) in urging the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) to bring to bear what pressure she can on the Government to arrange a debate in Government time on the situation of women in the third world. However, given that since 1979, under successive Conservative Administrations, this country has moved from being the second largest donor nation to being the second smallest donor nation, it is more than likely that her requests will fall on stony ground. However, I join her in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) for creating what I hope will be an annual event in the Chamber, that is, the discussion of women's position in this country and abroad.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) said that women's suffrage had been introduced in New Zealand in 1893, and I shall come back to that point in a moment. She also wondered whether she would have had the courage to withstand the pressure endured by the suffragettes. I can assure her that her concern about her possible lack of courage is not shared by any other hon. Member. We all know how she withstood the pressure exerted on her by Conservative Whips, so no one would argue that she lacked Yorkshire grit.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen said that women had been granted suffrage in New Zealand in 1893. Last year, I was privileged to be invited to attend the celebration of the centenary of the same event in South Australia. We shall have to wait for 30-odd years to celebrate the centenary of women's suffrage in this country. Women from all over the world, from developed nations such as ours and from the developing nations, attended the conference in Adelaide. The theme that ran throughout the conference was that, despite women having suffrage in many countries, we still have a long way to go, given that women comprise half the world's population.

That feeling was reinforced by a report published by the United Nations in 1980. It showed that two thirds of the world's work was done by one half of the world's population, that one tenth of the world's income was earned by one half of the world's population and that one hundredth of the world's property was owned by one half of the world's population. It is no surprise to me or, I am sure, to any other female hon. Member, to learn that the half of the world's population to which the report referred is the world's women.

Nowhere is the failure of nations, including our nation, to reflect the fact that women constitute half the world's population more evident than in the world's legislative assemblies. It is especially apparent here, in the mother of Parliaments. Some women have had the vote in this country for 78 years, but the country is yet to be represented by 10 per cent. of women sitting in the available seats.

Since some women first had the vote in these islands, I believe that there have been only 10 women holding Cabinet office, but we have never had a woman Foreign Secretary, we have never had a woman Secretary of State for Defence, we have never had a woman Chancellor of the Exchequer and we have never had a woman as Home Secretary. For me, it is of course a bitter irony that the first woman Prime Minister that this country produced had to be Margaret Thatcher.

Some Conservative Members have described as patronising my party's proposals to enable more women to present themselves to the electorate in order that the electorate may judge whether they wish to return them to Parliament. I, in common with every other woman in the Chamber, have had a soubriquet far worse than "patronising" or, indeed, "token", hurled at me, and I have little doubt that much harsher insults will be thrown at us in the future. I find nothing patronising in the idea that, in certain targeted seats, it should be a requirement that constituency parliamentary parties make a final short-list of all women. What I do find patronising is that the Government can suggest, for example, that a nurse should accept an increase of one and a half pennies in her salary.

No political party could function without women. It is the women members and activists who do the hard and sometimes extremely boring work on the street that facilitates the election not only of Members of Parliament but of councillors in local government elections. It is patronising that women should be deemed to be capable and fitted for such work but not to sit at the table where the decisions are made. That view still seems to inform the opinion, not only in the Chamber but without, that women still have an awfully long way to go before they are capable of fulfilling the functions which, in the past, have automatically been presupposed to be spheres for which men are most suited.

There is a tradition and, in a sense, a culture, that seems to regard the abilities which men are supposed to possess and which, on occasion, they feel a necessity to express, as particularly valid in this Chamber. They tend to be those of aggression and abrasiveness and an adversarial style of argument. It is no accident that this Chamber is, I think, the only one in the European Union that physically still encourages the adversarial style—I understand that the parties are still kept two-and-a-half sword lengths apart. The majority of European Union debating chambers are oval, round or rectangular. It seems that the architecture reflects the tone of the debates.

Women are not expected to be aggressive, adversarial or argumentative, characteristics still admired within the Chamber, but, I would suggest, less so in the country at large. That is one of the reasons why it is vital that all political parties, not least my own, should attempt to

balance the less than even playing field that women have to traverse if they wish to present themselves to the electorate for possible return to the House.

An opinion poll recently carried out for one of the more popular newspapers found that the two least popular professions were that of journalist and politician, in that order. One of the reasons why politicians tend to be less than popular with the electorate stems directly from what is perceived as their ill-tempered, ill-judged, loud and, in some instances, schoolboyish approach to our debates.

If we disaffect the very people who send us here, if we present the image that matters of moment are not seriously and levelly discussed here and that it is the scoring of points that is valued rather than the attempt to achieve a solution to a particular problem, interest in our political system could decay. Our democratic system depends as much on the interest of the electorate and their willingness to participate in our elections as on anything that happens in the Chamber or elsewhere in the House, such as in Committee.

One sometimes meets people who say with no small amount of pride that they have never voted. That strikes me very hard as a woman because I am aware that women died to give me the right to vote. It is a responsibility that I exercise with great seriousness. I urge everyone whom I meet, especially young women in my constituency, to vote. Although I would much prefer that they voted for my party, it is more important that they simply vote. It would be desperate if our freedoms in respect of the franchise, for which lives were given, were lost due to a lack of interest and commitment on the part of the electorate. I suggest that we have a responsibility to ensure that their interest stays alive and fresh.

No one could reasonably argue that any country approaching the 21st century can afford to discount, discard and disregard the undoubted talents, abilities, energy, imagination and commitment that the women of that society present.

I am of a generation to be extremely grateful, in one sense, to have been raised by the women in my family, simply because the men were away at war. During the second world war, as during the first world war, women ran not only their homes, but their country's factories, transport systems and hospitals. They ran the entire structure of their nation states because the men in those nation states were away, giving their lives in the defence of democracy and freedom.

Those women, at those times in our history, did not in that sense additionally have to improve themselves. No one thought that that was patronising them. They were by no means tokens in those positions. Our nation state was run extremely well during both—

Mrs. Peacock: I am listening with great interest. I agree with much of what the hon. Lady has said, but does she accept that it was the sterling work carried out by the women of this country, especially during the first world war, that helped to convince the men representing us in Parliament to pass, eventually, the Bill that enabled us all to have a vote, and enabled women to stand for Parliament? Does she agree that, without that war and the work done by women, we might not have made that progress?

Ms Jackson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention, but I do not agree with her analysis of the way in which the vote was given to women in this country, not least because, at the cessation of hostilities in the first world war and certainly in the second world war, women were patted on the head and told, "Thank you very much indeed, but now go back to what you really do best"—which tends to be situated in the kitchen and the nursery.

I think that, in the House at least, progress resulted from a lack of energy to sustain opposition to the giving of the vote to women, and shame that the country had denied it. Given the contribution that women had made during the first world war, there would have been an even greater outcry, but I do not believe that the House was convinced of that argument. I am unaware that any major move was made, between those two—one cannot say "high points" because they were world wars—low points in our civilisation, to facilitate opportunities for women to rise to what I regard as the positions that they should occupy.

I regret that I am unaware of any major concentrated effort in this place, or by the Government, business or the professions, to acknowledge that women have a great deal more to offer to our society, throughout all its aspects and all the levels and layers of which the nation state is comprised.

Mrs. Wise: I have followed my hon. Friend's argument with keen interest. It is true that women proved that they could run everything that men could run, but is not it also a fact that it was demonstrated that the nation, society and business were willing to accept that work, yet pay only half rates for it? Women shop assistants, for example, who coped with rationing as well as money, received about half the rates that men shop assistants received. That was a very poor reward for the efforts that women made during the war.

Ms Jackson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am afraid that the position is pretty similar today. I heard an exchange on the radio, as recently as last week, about the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 arrangements that had come into being in a local authority in the north of England. The gardeners, who, in the main, were male employees, retained their salary rates, hours and conditions of work, but the dinner ladies had to take a reduction in wages and an extension in their hours of work before they won the contract.

In 1992, I believe, the museum of London rightly held an exhibition based on the suffragette movement. I distinctly remember standing in that place and saying that one of the aspects of women's life in our country that most motivated the Pankhursts, all those years ago, was the conditions in which women were forced to work in sweatshops, in this city and every city throughout the land. The Pankhursts wished to remove the possibility of women having to work in appalling conditions for interminable hours, for very low rates of pay. Yet today, less than three miles from the museum of London, it would be possible to find women working in homes in circumstances that are as bad as, if not worse than, they were 78 years ago.

I entirely agree with what the hon. Member for Batley and Spen said. We have made progress in this country and in other parts of the world, but I contend that the country has a very long way to go. I do not think that any woman in the country needs to be apprised of the inequality of many of our positions and conditions. It is

[Ms Jackson]

not women necessarily who need to change; it is those who are less willing to help and move us forward to genuine equality.

All we ask, in essence, is to be able to exercise rights along with our responsibilities. No woman, in my experience, has ever shirked the responsibilities that life has placed on her. Every woman whom I have known has been able to balance and carry those responsibilities with no small grace, and often a great deal of humour. We have always made, and always will make, a major contribution to our societies. We are justified in asking very gently, and I have no doubt with a great deal of charm, that, on more than one occasion, we should be recognised for the contribution that we have made, and undoubtedly will continue to make.

6.26 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): As many other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall speak for only a few minutes.

I wish primarily to discuss the forthcoming conference in Peking, but first I wish to say how much I agreed with the remarks of the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), who congratulated my colleague, the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), on the introduction of his Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill on Friday 3 March. It showed that, compared with another Bill that was debated on Friday, if consensus is sought progress can be made.

Before moving to my main argument, I wish to mention a couple of other matters. There are two distinct sectors in which progress has been made on women's rights—the government sector and the non-government sector. Huge advances are obviously being made in the government sector. Many women are employed in the civil service, especially in senior positions. A woman heads Customs and Excise and a woman heads the Crown Prosecution Service, and I understand that we shall shortly have a woman permanent secretary at the Department of Social Security.

In the forces, huge progress has been made from the early 1990s onwards. The mistake made in dismissing pregnant women from the services has been recognised, and I am proud to say that a woman from Croydon became the Royal Air Force's first woman fighter pilot. Progress has been made by deploying Wrens at sea. It is not always an easy and comfortable state of affairs, but it has established a significant right in terms of equality.

I am afraid to say that the one organisation in which little progress has been made in employing women in government service is the European Commission, where I understand only four out of 300 people in the top two grades are women.

In the non-government sector, progress is not so obvious. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) mentioned difficulties that arose in the Trades Union Congress. The same difficulties arise in business. There is undoubtedly a glass ceiling. Women who are perfectly competent—probably more competent than their male counterparts—are often denied career advancement. They come up against all sorts of barriers. My wife experienced that in her career in advertising. The only way in which she could get around it was by starting her own business and becoming her own boss. I believe that it will be another generation before the barrier is removed completely and we recognise that women often run things much better than men.

The right to reproductive health care services is not just essential for the maintenance of women's health but crucial to the establishment of women's equality. The White Paper "The Health of the Nation" recognised the importance of reproductive health care services, particularly for young people. One of its key targets was a reduction in the number of teenage pregnancies.

Teenage pregnancy is a fundamental problem. One in five young women today report having had sexual intercourse before her 16th birthday. The good news is that, as a result of the efforts of the Department of Health, in 1991 the number of women younger than 16 who became pregnant fell for the first time in 10 years. It is far too soon to tell whether that represents a trend, but those who work in family planning are optimistic.

In an intervention, I said that, as progress is made towards a settlement in Northern Ireland, it may be appropriate to consider the discrepancies in the abortion laws of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Abortion Act 1967 applies in Great Britain, but the House deemed that it should not apply to Northern Ireland. That is causing serious problems for young women in Northern Ireland in this modern sophisticated world. They are forced to have back-street abortions, to pay to have abortions because there is no national health service provision or to come to this country to have abortions.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster replied to my intervention by saying that it is a very sensitive subject. It does not appear to be high on the list of Government priorities. I hope that that issue may be put on the agenda as we examine the overall situation in Northern Ireland.

The fourth world conference on women will be held in Peking in September under the auspices of the United Nations. I was lucky enough to attend the UN conference on population and development in Cairo, where women's issues were very much to the fore. That conference advanced a plan of action which provided for a number of fundamental women's rights in the area of reproductive and maternal health. When I attended the non-government organisation forum, which is where all the bright ideas come from, it became quite clear that women's issues will dominate United Nations and international considerations.

The all-party group on population, development and reproductive health, which I am privileged to chair, decided to look at the draft plan of action for the Peking conference and it was appalled to find no mention of reproductive health or sexuality. In the past couple of months we have conducted hearings with some 30 women's groups, inviting them to comment on what they think should be included in the draft plan of action for the Peking conference. As a result, the group is releasing a report tomorrow to coincide with International Women's Day and I shall inform the House of some of its main findings.

First, the group believes that the conference should endorse and incorporate the agreed principles and language of the international conference on population and development's programme of action, with particular reference to inequalities in health status and access to health care services, violence against women and women's rights. Secondly, it believes that the draft plan of action should specifically include women's

reproductive and sexual rights when addressing human rights. Thirdly, the group believes that, without reproductive and sexual health and rights, women cannot play a full and equal part in the economic, social and political life of their community and country.

The group's unanimous view was probably best summed up by Annette Lawson from the Fawcett Society, who said:

"Women need to be empowered to make decisions about themselves and their own bodies. Without that empowerment—and we see that, and indeed the major international conventions do, as a human right (and women's rights are human rights)—but without that capacity, rather like not having the vote, it disables women to function equally in society".

A preparatory conference will be held in the next few days to discuss the draft plan of action. I believe that it is important that that conference should take into account the strong feeling among women's groups that were consulted that those fundamental rights should be included on the agenda of the Peking conference. It is incomprehensible that they should not be included in this day and age.

I shall not take up any more of the time of the House. I simply make the point that we have consulted virtually every leading women's group in the country and we recognise that a number of rights are omitted from the draft plan of action. I hope that they will be included and discussed at the Peking conference.

6.36 pm

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): It is a happy coincidence to follow the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) because he is my Member of Parliament. I thank him for his generous remarks about my private Member's Bill.

I wish to approach the debate by examining the impact on women and men of changes in work, family life and care patterns in this country. Many of those issues are particularly important for women because they often take on most of the burden of care—whether it is care of the young, those with disabilities or the frail elderly. If we are to achieve greater gender equality, those issues must be considered more seriously by boys and by men. I think that that is occurring.

Patterns of employment in this country show trends towards mass unemployment and a concentration of joblessness in certain families. Paradoxically, at the same time we have seen the rise of the dual worker family and the concentration of employment in certain kinds of family groups. I wish to address the issues involving dual worker families that have resulted from the dramatic increase in female employment outside the home.

The rise of the dual worker family has brought many benefits, not least material ones. The most effective family social security policy in this country is not the child benefit scheme—although I applaud that—but the earning power of mothers. That has been the major anti-poverty strategy of the post-war period. I think that we should be aware that many dual worker families are increasingly overactive, overworked and, I think, overly stressed. That is a trend throughout the western world. We are living longer—women are living rather longer than men—usually into our seventies and sometimes into our eighties. It was my father's 80th birthday on Saturday, so I have some experience of that.

Although we are living longer, we are concentrating some of our most important activities into a small proportion of our lives. We enter the labour market much later than previously—normally for good reasons such as higher education and training—and many men and women are not fully active in the labour market until their late teens or early twenties and those with post-graduate qualifications do not start work until their early twenties.

We are also witnessing an earlier exit from the labour market. Many people who in a previous generation would have worked up to and beyond retirement age are now, either voluntarily or because of redundancy, being forced to leave the labour market in their fifties or, certainly for men, in their early sixties.

Discussions on the equality of retirement and pension age and decisions on whether the pensionable age should be 60 or 65—it is now 65—are based on an increasingly ignorant assumption that men actually work until they are 65. One third, or 33 per cent., of men aged 55 to 59 are officially unemployed or defined as economically inactive.

We are concentrating much of our labour market activity into a small proportion of our lives, which to some extent coincides with the important time for family building. That particularly impacts on women. Like men, many women need to be fully active in the labour market and spend their late twenties and early thirties career building. That increasingly coincides with when they are considering having children, becoming pregnant and taking on the responsibility of caring for young children.

Those pressures also affect men. Many men find that when their wives are no longer in the labour market or working part time after having babies, they have to work harder to earn more money and develop their careers at precisely the time when, perhaps in a more civilised society, they should be able to spend more time at home as fathers. I am worried by what I see as the care-career collision, which puts tremendous pressures on men and women from their late twenties to their early and late thirties.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Is my hon. Friend aware of evidence showing that 10 years after graduation four times as many women graduates as men graduates have chosen not to start a family? The pressure of worrying about making that choice clearly impinges much more on women's career patterns—and they may, therefore, choose to have children much later—than it does on men, who do not feel that it interferes too much with their careers.

Mr. Wicks: I am aware of that. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point and I shall say something about the impact of that on fertility patterns and average family size in Britain.

Many families are overworked and overactive, trying to build their families at the same time as building their careers. If I am right about that, it is not an argument—as it might have been among some hon. Members a generation ago—about a woman's place being in the home, but one of increasing relevance to men and women, about the need to take seriously an agenda for family and work.

May I say something about changing patterns of care, which is obviously a major role—perhaps the major role—for the family? Traditionally, it has been the major

[Mr. Wicks]

role for women in all societies to provide care for those in the family who need it. However, if we are to draw up the agenda that we need, we must be aware of and fully understand the changing patterns of care as they affect men and women.

We think immediately of children. Women in Europe are having fewer children. On average, women in Britain are having more children than those in most European Union nations, but the numbers are declining. In 1970, the average British woman had 2.4 children; in 1992, the figure was just 1.8. It will probably continue at about that level until the turn of the century.

Let us consider the average figures for the European Union, which relate to 12 member states rather than the present larger union. In 1970, the average European woman had 2.4 children. In 1992, she had just 1.5 children and the trend is downwards. A child has gone missing in Europe. That explains why fertility and birth rates are of great national concern and inform and instruct domestic policy in many other Parliaments in Europe. In Germany, the average number of children is just 1.3, in Catholic Italy it is 1.3 and in Spain it is 1.2. Those are dramatic trends and although we need to explain them in a number of different ways—and I shall not do so today—my guess would be that the pressures of work, career and family building on women and families lie behind some of the fertility trends.

We are having fewer children in Europe, although, interestingly, the trend is less marked here in Britain, and our children are dependent financially on others—typically parents, but sometimes the state—for longer. Gone are the days—although in Britain those days were only in the early 1970s—where six out of 10 children left school at 16 and got jobs. Today, many children will be dependent on their parents their until late teens or early twenties and sometimes their mid-twenties. The role of the family and the pattern of having children is changing considerably.

We are becoming aware that one of the major roles of women—and, increasingly of men—is the caring role for the frail elderly, as the aging of our population is such a dramatic trend. In 1981, there were half a million people aged 85 and over, whereas in 1901 the figure was just 57,000, so the number has risen 10 times in 80 years. The figure will double again between 1981 and 2001, so that by 2001 there will be more than 1 million people aged 85 and over. Many of them will be fit and healthy, but many will need care and have physical and mental problems. For example, Alzheimer's disease is a growing problem.

The issues of care that now impinge so much on women increasingly wear an older face, and we need to look at care patterns across four or five generations and examine how men, women and families respond to them. It is a cruel coincidence that family sizes are smaller at precisely the point in the country's demography when there are more elderly to care for. In previous generations, there might have been six or seven children to look after one elderly relative. The ratios today are moving in the other direction, with smaller families having more elders to care for.

Parliament and other institutions woke up, albeit late in the day, to the fact that many workers have the "annoying" habit of being parents, so there is an agenda covering maternity or paternity leave and provision for under-fives. We must wake up to the fact also that women employees and a growing number of male employees care for the elderly, so the carer-worker issue is growing more important.

At meetings that I have attended to inform myself for the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill that I introduced last Friday, I was struck by how many carers—mainly women but men too—had to give up their employment and often successful careers to care for an elderly relative or disabled child or adolescent. Many people find it impossible, sometimes because of unsympathetic employers, to continue the dual role of carer-worker.

Up-to-date information is not available, but years ago the Equal Opportunities Commission published a survey that showed that the main reason for women leaving the employment market before retirement age was to care for an elderly relative.

If in future, for the benefit of women and gender equality, we are to balance work and the family, a newer analysis of the issues is needed that places less reliance on conventional economic indicators. Most people in the west think of work in terms of getting up in the morning, going to a job and getting paid for it. That kind of work, and only that kind of work, is quantified in employment statistics and it contributes to the gross domestic product. It excludes some of the most important work, typically done by women but also by men, in the community.

Such work excludes, for example, the female general practitioner whom I met in Cardiff. For years she was able to practise as a doctor but when her grown-up child became schizophrenic she had to leave the formal labour market to become a full-time carer. She immediately disappeared from employment statistics and her labour is not measured. Neither, in terms of conventional indicators, does she supposedly contribute to the country's GDP. In other words, she counts for nothing officially.

"Counting for Nothing", a book by an influential New Zealand academic and one-time National party politician, Marilyn Waring, authoritatively challenged male-dominated economics. Although that line of analysis is of academic interest in the best sense of the word "academic", if we are not to make mistakes in analysing work and care issues about how to care for our children and the elderly and about the implications for social and employment policies, seemingly academic argument must move into the political world. There is an argument for Parliament, as an exercise, drawing up rival national accounts that introduce some of the value of care.

People rightly ask about the public expenditure implications of provisions such as those contained in my Bill, but they rarely ask about the cost-benefit analysis. Some years ago, I and a colleague—Melanie Henwood at the Family Policy Studies Centre—sought to calculate the value of care provision, and we have since updated the figure to £30 billion. The British Medical Association recently used the same methodology but produced a larger sum. That is not an argument for giving carers £30 billion, but in a society that, sadly, increasingly puts a price on everything and knows the value of nothing, sometimes it is necessary to attach a cash price to something to make people appreciate its value.

If community care services could be improved, that would show up in public expenditure documents. Some members of the Treasury Bench might see that as a problem. However, if only one carer in 10 surrendered

that task so that the person for whom they cared had to enter a state institution or hospital at a cost of £2 billion, that would not show up in national accounts and would be invisible. It is nevertheless real arithmetic. Every week, as we know from our surgeries, a carer collapses under the strain and the national health service or a private nursing home has to take in one more person. An analysis that considers only public expenditure costs and does not undertake a wider cost-benefit calculation is misleading.

Care issues, the way in which we define work and a better balance between family life and employment are among the most crucial topics facing men and women. Parliament and Governments are less aware of those issues than the public. How we enable the modern Briton and European to be successful as a partner to the person to whom they are married or with whom they live, as a parent and as a carer if necessary—and also successful in the labour market and as a career builder—is crucial to women. Many men want to share the caring role, so that issue is of growing importance to them.

6.59 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): First, I apologise for not having been present throughout the debate. I had to attend a Committee in another part of the House, but I did hear the speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short). I appreciate that today is an Opposition day and, quite naturally, the hon. Lady wanted to make complaints against the Government and set out Labour party policy, although we did not hear too much about that. However, had she taken a more bipartisan view on some of the issues that she raised towards the end of her speech, she would have found cross-currents coming from the Conservative Benches.

For example, the hon. Lady spoke about the legal position of women and the protection afforded to them by the law. That is an important subject about which there is some controversy at present regarding female victims of serious sexual offences. I would make common cause with the hon. Lady on the need to give maximum protection through the law to victims of sexual offences, particularly in relation to the disclosure of identity. There has been controversy about disclosing the identity of defendants in such cases and I do not want to argue about that—

Ms Short: I am more than happy when there is consensus on any issue that is dear to me because it means that we are more likely to make progress, but I sometimes think that Conservative Members do not live in this country of ours. The number of families struggling on low incomes with all the stress that results from the way in which the labour market is being restructured constitutes a crisis for our society. I meant every word that I said. I am afraid that the Government's strategy is making things worse for such families. If there is no consensus, then that is how it is.

Mr. Clappison: I shall take issue with the hon. Lady about that, but I am talking about an entirely separate and important matter which is of public interest at the present time and the subject of some controversy. I hope that the hon. Lady will make common cause with the point that I am about to make. I do not want to go into whether defendants should remain anonymous, save to say that the arguments about that are entirely separate from those concerning whether the victims of sexual offences should remain anonymous. It is important that they should remain anonymous and have that protection from the law.

I would go further and say that it is important that all impediments should be removed which prevent victims of serious offences from taking their cases to the courts. I welcome some of the progress that has been made recently on that, including the important change in the criminal justice legislation, which I think had cross-party support, in relation to the treatment of the evidence of complainants in cases of sexual offences, where we removed the need for judges to give warnings about corroboration. That important step forward will benefit many victims.

It was monstrous that in the past judges had to give a warning about the evidence of complainants in such cases as though they were inherently unreliable people. Many judges, particularly women judges, have referred to having to give that warning through gritted teeth and I am pleased that the requirement for it has been removed. We need to consider carefully how to make it possible and easy for victims in such cases to go before the courts without suffering unnecessary fear. I hope that the hon. Lady will make common cause with me on that.

I take issue with the hon. Lady on the substance of her speech today. She referred to living in the real world. If in her speech she was trying to suggest that there has not been any progress in the status of women, particularly in the opportunities for women to move forward in careers and the professions during the past 15 years, she has been living in an unreal world.

There is plainly a great deal of evidence that women have made progress during the past 15 years. One can look across the board at the professions. In my profession there has clearly been a great deal of much needed progress during the past 15 years. When the Labour Government left office—this was no reflection on the Labour party, however—only 10 per cent. of members of the Bar were women. Today, 22 per cent. are women.

The hon. Lady complains about the lack of female judges, and I agree that it is desirable that there should be more women judges, particularly in the higher reaches of the judiciary, but we have so few women judges today because of the lack of progress in the past and the lack of suitably qualified and experienced candidates. As progress is now taking place and the shortage of women at the Bar is being remedied, I happily predict that there will be more women judges in the future. The same is true across the board in the professions. Today there are more women doctors, dentists, accountants and architects. Across the board, women are making welcome advances.

I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said about the position of women in the civil service. Women are advancing in the civil service. The overall percentage of women employed in the top seven grades in the civil service has risen from 7 per cent. in 1980 to 13 per cent. today. I agree that there is still scope for improvement, but let us acknowledge the improvement that has been made.

Education is one reason why there will be more women entering the professions, but the hon. Lady cast doubts on the Government's achievements in promoting higher education and access to higher education for women. In the academic year beginning in 1979 when the Labour party left office, 190,000 women students were in higher education. That figure has more than doubled to 410,000

[Mr. Clappison]

today. The proportion of full-time students has also risen, from 40 per cent. in 1979 to 49 per cent. today. I hope that the hon. Lady recognises that as progress and joins me in welcoming it.

Ms Short: I am fairly sure that I said that women are now equalling and even excelling boys in large parts of the education system. Nevertheless, the proportion of our young people in higher education is lower than, for example, in South Korea. There has been progress, but it is not good enough in terms of the future of the British economy compared with the investment in education taking place in other countries.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Lady is having to scrape around for some international comparisons. The fact that stands out is that when the Labour party left office one in eight people in the relevant age group, male and female, went into higher education and today the proportion is one in three. The hon. Lady would do well to recognise that achievement. If we are lagging behind in any comparisons today, which I doubt, it is because we started from such a low point when Labour left office. The same applies to further education, where there has similarly been an extremely large increase in the number of females.

We have had a welter of statistics today on women in employment generally. I rest my case for saying that women's position has improved on three statistics. First, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said, there are more women in the work force today than ever before, more than there were in 1979 when 40 per cent. of the work force was women. Today the figure is 46 per cent. Those women are also earning more than ever before. In addition, the gender gap in earnings, to which the hon. Lady referred, has been closing since 1980. In 1980, women's wages were 37 per cent. less than those of men; today the figure is 30 per cent. The gap is closing, and closing quickly. Since 1990, female earnings have increased by 30 per cent. compared with 23 per cent. for men.

Those three statistics—the number of women in the work force, the increase in women's earnings and the closing of the gap between men and women's earnings—are significant, broadly based and persuasive. They demonstrate that, across the board, the lot of women is improving. Whether they are employed by large employers or in the professions or whether they are in managerial positions, there has been a significant improvement.

It is important for women to have successful role models to show them that it is possible for them in their chosen career or profession to rise to the top on the basis of their merits, judged on their abilities, enjoying full equality of opportunity.

Today's debate is timely in one respect, at least, in that approximately 20 years ago today this country elected the first female leader of a major political party, who went on to become Prime Minister and to win three successive general elections. When the now Baroness Thatcher became leader of the Conservative party in 1975, it gave an enormous boost to women in this country, because it showed them that they could rise to the very top. It gave a boost to women in public life.

One prominent female figure in public life told her diary, after hearing of Mrs. Thatcher's election as party leader:

"I have had a growing conviction that this would happen: she is so clearly the best man among them and she will, in my view, have an enormous advantage in being a woman too. I can't help feeling a thrill . . . I have been saying for a long time that this country is ready—even more than ready—for a woman Prime Minister."

Baroness Castle wrote that in her diary in 1975. She was objective in those comments. She was speaking as a woman, setting herself apart from her political views, which were obviously vastly different from those of Margaret Thatcher, but she felt that there was a lesson there for the Labour party.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a pity that the Labour party is unable to sustain, even remotely, the kind of progress that we have made? Is he aware that only three out of 73 trade union leaders are women, and they come from the Labour party?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend's extremely good intervention was very well anticipated. I was about to quote again from the noble Baroness Castle's diary. I invite the attention of the hon. Member for Ladywood, as she will remember the time, I am sure. Barbara Castle wrote:

"I think it will be a good thing for the Labour Party too. There's a male-dominated party for you—not least because the trade unions are male-dominated, even the ones that cater for women. I remember just before the February election last year pleading on the NEC for us not to have a completely producer-oriented policy, because women lose out in the producer-run society."

Ms Short *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I will happily give way if the hon. Lady wants to tell us about a producer-run society.

Ms Short: I know that the hon. Gentleman apologised for not having been in the Chamber earlier, but that point was dealt with in an exchange between the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and myself.

Mr. Clappison: I did say at the beginning of my speech—I do not know whether the hon. Lady was here—that I was present for her speech. I heard that intervention and it made me think back to what I had read in the noble Baroness Castle's diary. I will share my thought with the hon. Lady. For all that the hon. Lady said to my right hon. Friend about what was taking place in trade unions, it struck me that there has not been a great deal of progress since 1975—20 years ago—when Barbara Castle wrote those words.

Today that lack of progress is indicated, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) made clear in her intervention, by the small number of women who are trade union leaders. The hon. Member for Ladywood will appreciate that there is a big difference between women being treated as some sort of sectional interest who can be accommodated—who can be made to make do with a gesture—and being given full equality of opportunity to rise to the top on the basis of their merits. There is a clear distinction between those two things. Clearly, an enormous amount of progress remains to be made in the trade union movement.

The hon. Lady will know that last year there was a leadership election in her party. I do not want to go into that, as that is a private matter for the Labour party, but

she must concede that, from that election, it is clear that the Labour party is still a considerable distance from electing a female leader. I happened to read, because I am interested in these things, the election statement of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who now leads the Labour party. It came as a surprise to me that not once in that statement did he mention the role of women or what he intended to do for women. I know that the hon. Lady will say that things have changed since then and that the right hon. Gentleman has set out his policies, but that seemed to me to be something of an omission and it says something about the subconscious attitude of the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): In my constituency the Labour party has decided to put up an all-woman list of candidates for selection. Is that not a disgrace? Does it not show a remarkable lack of confidence in the ability of women to rise to the top in the election process? If my hon. Friend looks around the Conservative Benches, he will see great examples of women rising to such positions.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he has caused great interest among the hon. Ladies who surround me.

I do not want to go into private Labour party matters, but there seems to be a great deal of turmoil in that party—in its leadership elections, its candidate selections, and so on, in which women are fighting very hard to overcome what they see as prejudice. The difference between Labour Members and Conservative Members is that we do not have to fight against that sort of prejudice, because it does not exist here; it was expelled 20 years ago when we elected a female leader.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, in case I do not have an opportunity to get my fourpenny-worth in the debate. Leaving party politics aside, does he agree that the House is the jury of the nation? It is not an Olympic track, where the best person wins. It is not a company where the top talent rises. We are talking here about an institution which should represent the whole of our community—stupid, white, black, women, men, three-legged, two-legged, whatever. That is why getting into this place is different. It should be different from the race metaphor, which has been used time and again in the debate.

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point, which she made clearly. I would not want in any way to comment on or challenge the point that she made, save to say that she is living proof of the vibrancy of views within our party.

To return to party politics, since the Leader of the Opposition issued his personal statement, which omitted to mention women altogether, he has come to appreciate the importance of the women's vote. Speaking recently, he decided to announce an important policy initiative for his party, to *She* magazine, which is described as a magazine

"For women who juggle their lives".

It was a well thought out initiative and he was clear to whom he wanted to speak, as that magazine is produced by the same group which produces *Country Living*, *The Antique Collector* and *House Beautiful*. He was clearly making a bid for a different sort of readership for Labour party policy. He seems to have been conscious of that throughout his interview, in which he gave the lady interviewing him the impression that he was prepared to show, in her words

"two fingers to the educational dinosaurs of the ultra-Left."

I cannot imagine who he was thinking of at that point.

The right hon. Gentleman spelled out Labour party policy with his usual great clarity and restated much of what he said in his personal manifesto.When asked what he stood for, he said "social-ism", which he described as

"the belief that people do best in a strong society. Unless you are prepared to create the underpinnings of that strong society, the individual does not move as fast as he or she can. It is not about class, or trades unions, or capitalism versus socialism. It is about a belief in working together to get things done."

I hope that the readers of *She* magazine were illuminated by that and that Labour party policy was clarified for them. I hope that they had a nice cup of hot milk before bed as well.

Lady Olga Maitland: Is my hon. Friend aware that in the same article the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) pledged support for tax relief for nannies? Indeed, Labour Members have tabled a new clause to the Finance Bill advocating tax relief for nannies. The Labour party is putting up a nannies charter—a total U-turn after years of being utterly dismissive of professional women who choose to employ nannies.

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has an uncanny knack of anticipating what I am about to say. She mentioned the Standing Committee on the Finance Bill. I hope I am not doing the Labour party an injustice, but it seems that its leader chose to reveal what would become party policy not to that Committee but to the readership of *She*. Although he said that he was cautious about committing his Government at this stage, he is quoted as also saying:

"Tax relief is one of the things we are looking at".

There we have it: the first step that the right hon. Gentleman has taken on his way to a caring, sharing society of social justice and co-operation is to consider tax relief for nannies.

I do not know whether that proposal will receive warmer applause from the working women of Sedgefield, who will presumably have to subsidise the tax relief with their income tax, or from high earners in Islington and elsewhere in the south of England, but I do not envisage Opposition Members such as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and his friends dancing with glee in the Lobby at the prospect of voting for tax relief for people wealthy enough to employ nannies.

Perhaps this will be the start of a new Labour campaign. Perhaps there will be a new slogan, and a new definition of the welfare state: "Full employment for all from the cradle to the nursery". The expression on the face of the hon. Member for Ladywood suggests that the policy has not been received with much enthusiasm by the Opposition and we would do well not to take it too seriously; it looks to me like another bit of window dressing from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield which will bite the dust before much longer.

Women in this country today can place their trust in the substantial and fair progress that has been made. There has been a move towards equality of opportunity: that is clearly demonstrated by the increasing number of women in top jobs. Women are moving through the professions;

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they are better paid than ever before in real terms. The gender gap is closing. All of that is solid progress—for which I commend my right hon. and hon. Friends—as opposed to the pie in the sky offered by the Leader of the Opposition.

7.22 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): There is no better indicator of the health of a society than the health of its individual citizens; but to examine women's health in Britain is to see a divided nation. Many women, especially in the home counties and the south, enjoy the best of health, while many others in inner cities and the north bear an unnecessary burden of disease and premature death.

The 1991 census established the number of women with a "limiting long-term illness" in each health authority. According to that definition, the five healthiest health authorities are West Berkshire, North West Surrey, South West Surrey—that authority, of course, covers the constituency of the Secretary of State for Health—Mid-Downs and Tunbridge Wells. The number of women with limiting long-term illnesses in each of those authorities is more than 20 per cent. lower than the national average. The five health authorities in which women suffer the greatest burden of ill health are Central Manchester, North Manchester, Barnsley, North Durham and Sunderland. The number of women with limiting long-term illnesses in those health authorities is more than 30 per cent. higher than the national average.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the same ratio would apply to men? He is centralising the statistics to apply them to women, but what he says is irrelevant to the debate.

Mr. Bayley: I do not think that it is irrelevant. The simple answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no: these figures do not apply to men as well. As he would see if he referred to the Department of Health's public health common data set, there are wide variations between the health of men and that of women.

The purpose of today's debate is not merely to highlight differences and inequalities between men and women. It is a debate about the lives of women in Britain today, and the inequalities in life opportunities and health between certain groups of women also matter greatly. Barnsley is one of the five health authorities with an exceptionally large burden of ill health. The census revealed that 20,809 women in the area had a limiting long-term sickness—36 per cent. above the national average. If the national average figure applied in Barnsley, there would be 5,508 fewer women with limiting long-term illnesses.

The national health service has simply failed to meet the health needs of women in Barnsley. Their needs have been ignored by a Government who are obsessed with the efficiency of the service, which they measure in terms of numbers of completed episodes—numbers of patients treated—rather than in terms of the underlying principle of the NHS, which is to provide health care on the basis of equity; in other words, on the basis of health need.

When people talk of women's health—this is also an answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie)—they often refer to diseases such as cervical cancer and breast cancer, from which only women suffer. In fact, the big killer diseases for women are strokes, heart disease and respiratory disease. Perhaps, on National No-smoking Day, I should also mention lung cancer, which is fast catching up with breast cancer in terms of the number of women's lives that it claims each year; indeed, it may have just overtaken it.

Smoking may cause those illnesses, but overwhelmingly they are caused by poverty. As others have pointed out—in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise)—poverty is more usually a woman's rather than a man's problem, and that mars the position of women in Britain.

According to the Department of Health's public health common data set, the death rate among women of all ages is lowest in South West Surrey—the area represented by the Secretary of State for Health. According to the census, two thirds of its population are members of non-manual social classes. The death rate is highest in Central Manchester, where fewer than a third are members of social classes I, II and IIIN—the non-manual classes. In other words, death rates are higher among women in lower socio-economic groups. If I may put it crudely, poor women die younger.

The death rate among women aged between 15 and 64 is lowest in Huntingdon health authority—in the Prime Minister's area—at 25 per cent. below the national average. Four other health authorities tie in second place: Tunbridge Wells, North West Surrey, Winchester and Norwich. There the death rate is 21 per cent. below the national average. It is highest in Salford, Central Manchester and North Manchester health authorities, where the figure is more than 40 per cent. higher than the national average.

The premature death rate among women in the poorest parts of the country is not only high but increasing. In the past five years, the Salford rate has increased from 42 per cent. above the national average to 53 per cent. above it; the Central Manchester rate from 58 per cent. above the national average to 69 per cent. above it; and the North Manchester rate from 68 per cent. above the national average to 80 per cent. above it.

The Secretary of State for Health says that the Labour party should not concern itself with health inequalities because the health of all groups of the population is improving and it is just that the health of the healthiest is improving fastest. That simply is not true. The health of the poorest and the most disadvantaged groups of women is declining in real and absolute terms.

It is not just inequality in terms of death rates. The same pattern of inequality between north and south and between inner cities and shires exists at birth. The percentage of low birth weight babies—babies weighing under 2,500 g—is lowest in a similar collection of health authorities, including Tunbridge Wells, Halton, Worthing, East Sussex and Salisbury, and highest in Nottingham, Central Manchester, Rochdale, North Manchester and West Birmingham. The NHS provision for women is marred by women's health inequalities from the cradle to the grave.

There are two ways in which to look at the problem. In the White Paper "The Health of the Nation", the Government tend to shrug off the problem. The White Paper says:

> "The reasons for these variations are by no means fully understood."

The Australian Labor Government in their equivalent to "The Health of the Nation", a very hard-hitting report entitled "Enough to make you sick: how income and environment affect health", conclude:

"Ill-health can lead to worsening social and economic circumstances, which in turn adversely affect health. So health care should be distributed according to physical and social need, not just physical need."

The report identifies the social and economic circumstances that particularly affect women. It says that certain groups of women, especially sole parents, are likely to "have very poor health."

The British Government need to take a leaf out of the Australian Government's book. First, they need to acknowledge that there is a problem—a widening problem—of women's health inequalities. Secondly, they need to agree that the health inequalities are not inevitable. Thirdly, they need to agree that there is a need to seek solutions.

Lady Olga Maitland: Although I do not dispute the general picture of ill health or poor health among less economically viable women which the hon. Gentleman gives, does he agree that that is why it is so important that we have a health service that delivers excellent health care at the point of delivery, always free of charge? More than that, we have a health service which, by ensuring that we eliminate waste, puts more money into patient care to look after the very women about whom, rightly, the hon. Gentleman and I are concerned.

Mr. Bayley: The first point on which I take issue with the hon. Lady is her description of "less economically viable" women. It is not that the women are inadequate but that the society that the Government create does not provide economic opportunities for those women. Secondly, the hon. Lady suggests that the national health service simply has to run itself in a way that maximises the number of treatments given.

Lady Olga Maitland *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bayley: That is what I understood the hon. Lady to have said. She said that the health service should be efficient and should maximise the number of treatments that could be given. What is important is to target treatment on those who most need it—those who will benefit most from health intervention. That patently is not happening.

Lady Olga Maitland *rose—*

Mr. Bayley: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment. I hope that she will listen to what I am saying.

Such targeting patently is not happening at the moment. The health inequalities are widening in the area of what the Government themselves describe as "avoidable diseases". If the burden of avoidable disease is increasing among the poor, why is the national health service not targeting those avoidable diseases? Why does the NHS not target strokes and hypertensive diseases, to reduce their incidence among the social groups that are most seriously affected? That is not happening as a result of the NHS reforms.

Lady Olga Maitland: On the broader picture, is the hon. Gentleman aware that there are deprivation payments to GPs in inner-city areas so that they can deliver the service that these women need? He is skating over the problem and trying to create alarm when help is available. I am sure that he agrees that we must help women to take advantage of the available assistance.

Mr. Bayley: The test of whether the policy is working is whether the health of the poor is improving. The Government's own figures show that the health of the poor is not improving as fast as the health of the better-off because resources are being targeted in favour of health interventions for the better-off. In the worst possible cases—I cited three earlier—the mortality rate of poor women in poor health authorities is deteriorating. The death rate for women between 16 and 64 in those northern health authorities increased in absolute terms between 1987 and 1992. That shows that the interventions made under Government policy are not matching the growing burden of ill health which environmental and social conditions are creating.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I do not want to get involved in the detailed points that the hon. Gentleman has exchanged with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). I ask him, because he is knowledgeable in these matters, how much of the change in some of the women's killer diseases, which have been growing, is the predictable outcome of smoking and how much is linked to what people eat? Obviously, there are environmental issues as well, which I do not dispute. Could we predict what the change over the next 10 years in the death rate among women who smoke will be, as a result of the increased number of women who smoke? I agree that we need to have fewer women smoking in areas where women still smoke too much. We should talk about those issues as much as we talk about deprivation payments and the concentration on inner-city health areas. We should try to get the improvements in other areas of women's health that we have achieved in maternal mortality and infant mortality, which are the two crucial points that the Black report, of which I have an original copy, said were the test of whether Government policy was right.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman has an original copy of the Black report; he has a very rare volume indeed.

It is, of course, important to focus on the causes of ill health. Like the hon. Gentleman, I am concerned that, because of promotion by tobacco companies, the incidence of smoking among young women, especially, is increasing. The hon. Gentleman asked what effect that would have on mortality rates from lung cancer among women. I suspect that we shall see the result in the long term because lung cancer is a long-term disease. There is a typical pattern of 30 or 40 years of smoking before the penalty of lung cancer develops. Of course we must address those issues, as we must address the issue of diet.

The Government, however, make a mistake when they suggest that women's health inequalities are caused by genetic, cultural and behavioural factors. They are to some extent, but they are also caused by poverty, poor housing, a lack of community care and a mistargeting of NHS resources on those women whose health needs are not the greatest. Those issues must be addressed if women's health inequalities are to be reduced. There is a maldistribution of resources for community care and health. Resources are not targeted on those women whose health needs are greatest. The time has come for the Government to concentrate on putting those problems right.

7.39 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House for not having been in the Chamber for a couple of hours, while I had to attend other committee meetings. I very much hope that I shall not repeat any of the arguments, although I shall doubtless be advised if I begin to do so.

Unusually for a politician, I wish to raise questions to which I have no glib answers. I would not expect my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to provide any answers, but if she will consider the issues I raise, it would go some way towards reassuring me that we are moving towards a considered reaction to some of the complex issues that concern me.

Hon. Members have referred to economic changes in the past 20 to 30 years, and I have no intention of repeating those references. I was very active in campaigning for equal rights for women in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, which is why I shall not go into the matter in great depth.

Many hon. Members will not remember the days when there were no women news readers on the television. One of the achievements of myself and my friends in the organisation Women in Media was to change that in television and radio. Now, of course, there is more than equality among news readers.

That is a minor illustration of the major economic changes to the position of women in the past 30 years. Those changes, however, have brought with them some of the problems that we are discussing today. We have seen and gone through the increase in the number of women in the professions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) gave a very good exposition of it.

Those of us who have been involved in women's issues for a long time will know the phrase "the glass ceiling" very well. That glass ceiling has risen substantially, but we have still not got it up to the top, as witnessed by the debate about trade union leadership, the number of women directors and the number of women in significant posts.

I have some sympathy with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) about the difficulty of more women coming into the House of Commons, but that is a different issue, because one takes a most unusual career path to get here. I shall therefore take the number of women in the House of Commons out of the debate.

When I go around schools, as I am sure many of us do, to speak to girls and mixed classes in the sixth form, I still find the age-old problems that we all identified all those years ago: peer pressure, parental pressure and—the key problem among women—lack of confidence and belief in their own abilities. Women need a degree of encouragement that we do not necessarily find among their male colleagues. It is being overcome in education, but socially it is still a problem, and needs to be dealt with. Sixth-form girls need that extra bit of confidence to put their foot on that ladder and know that they can get to the top and through the glass ceiling.

Not only is it true that, over the past 20 to 30 years, women have made tremendous strides in their economic position, but the technology of work is changing towards favouring women. Heavy, unskilled work is being taken out of daily life and being replaced with the use of technology, dexterity and brains. Those are women's abilities and their principal contribution to the work force. We can most crudely describe that change as brawn now being cheap and brain being dear.

That brings us to a conflict. There is no reason why women who wish to progress cannot do so as far as they want, but—I hope not to be making either a party political or a moral judgment—there are also women who opt out. We need to consider very carefully the latter category of women. We need to find out why they opt out. Why do they become the single mums who are causing such problems and angst in our society? Many hon. Members have referred to the issue.

There are various categories of single mums. I am a product of a single mother who took over the family firm. I am therefore in one very privileged category. It is not new or unique. There are divorced mothers—left, perhaps, with a reasonable maintenance settlement. There are widows with children. Then there are those who are unmarried.

In my constituency, it is reckoned that more than 50 per cent. of all live births are to single mothers who are not in a stable relationship. That is a most horrendous statistic with which to deal. We all know that the children of those mothers, who—broadly—are condemned to a life of poverty, face a life of deprivation and find it difficult in school and in later life to become the social and economic animals that we all need to be to succeed.

Ms Short: I do not want to interrupt the hon. Lady's general point, as I want to see where she is going, but is she aware of statistics that show that many of those young women go on to form a partnership and a stable relationship? We often talk as though it is a condition for life. From the figures, it is not. Those women frequently form partnerships.

Mrs. Lait: I completely accept the hon. Lady's point, but, if I were to describe every category, I would not get through to the question that I am trying to pose. I hope that the hon. Lady bears with me and agrees that there is a category of women about whom most of us are concerned.

The group includes young girls, who—with the benefit, one would have thought, of sex education in school—are pregnant when they leave school. Alarming statistics show the number of girls leaving council care at the age of 16 who are either pregnant or with a child, and one has to ask, why are they in that position? What drives them to create a set of circumstances that they will find very difficult to get out of?

We may all offer simple explanations. The problem is that every explanation is different. There are about 20 or 30 explanations and I shall not go through them, but they include getting away from mum, having a baby that is one's own and is a toy rather than a reality, and getting a house and benefits. I am not making any moral statement, but those explanations are given time and time again.

I am sure that it goes much deeper than that. Until we find out why this coterie of women are condemning themselves to a life out of the mainstream of society, we cannot fix the problem.

Mrs. Gorman: Before my hon. Friend leaves an extremely important and very interesting subject, I hope that she will turn her thoughts to the role of single young fathers. Young men, of course, get these young women

pregnant and walk away from their responsibility. Does she not think that we should do more to educate our young boys in what used to be called good behaviour and honour towards women?

Mrs. Lait: I have tremendous sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. I, too, would like it if everybody who had a right also had a responsibility. By making it easier for boys to walk away, we are placing the responsibility for contraception and for the child on women. But I want to deal with the reality. It is the woman who is left with the child. One of the most recent sociological explanations is that, because unskilled young men can no longer maintain a family, women are rejecting them. They are positively deciding to reject them.

Ms Short: Because they have no income.

Mrs. Lait: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. That is yet another explanation of the phenomenon. We have not yet got to the bottom of the problem. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is now aware that there is no easy answer to it. I would be more than grateful if someone could come up with an easy answer, but I am sure that there is no such easy answer.

Dr. Lynne Jones: There is no easy answer. The hon. Lady has raised a very important issue. A large group of people in our society are alienated to such an extent that they have no hope for the future. They therefore have no aspirations beyond having a baby and obtaining the minimal levels of benefit. That is not a good life; it is a life of poverty. Why have those women lost that aspiration? Why has the situation become worse during the period of this Government, under whom inequality has risen? We should be concerned about that group in society which is alienated from the rest of us.

Mrs. Lait: I am afraid that the hon. Lady has added yet another explanation as to why the phenomenon has arisen without, other than in a very glib party political way, trying to solve the problem. This is the third time that I have made my point, and I apologise if I am being repetitive. However, we must be clearer in our minds what is genuinely causing the problem, so that we can begin to address the solution more effectively than the remedies that have been tried so far.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I assumed that the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) was giving way. Is that correct?

Mrs. Lait: Yes. I was giving way to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland).

Lady Olga Maitland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, in what has been the most thoughtful and most useful contribution in the entire debate. I totally accept that there is no easy answer. However, will my hon. Friend ponder for a moment or two why marriage has now slipped from the agenda as the normal way of family life? It is now accepted that people will have partners and transitory relationships. Does my hon. Friend agree that we cannot put the blame entirely on schools or the media? Society as a whole is to blame. Does she not agree that we must reinvigorate the concepts of the family and of marriage?

Mrs. Lait: My hon. Friend has added yet another strand to the conundrum we face. I have tremendous sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. We must get to grips with the problem, because society cannot afford those young women opting out and not making the best of their lives, quite apart from the lives of the children whom they are raising.

I have a further, possibly more radical, thought, on a different area. I said earlier that I campaigned very vigorously in the early 1970s for equal rights for women. One of the things I campaigned for was the Equal Opportunities Commission. It is now 20 years since the EOC was founded. It has funded and achieved some very distinguished legal victories. While many of us may find them difficult to live with, we probably agree in our heart of hearts with what has been achieved.

However, it is now about time that we reviewed whether the EOC meets today's needs. I have a brief resumé of what the commission did in 1993. It produced 13 publications, including the annual report. Grants were given to 27 voluntary sector projects. Twelve research projects were commissioned, on topics such as women and low pay, and black women in the labour market. In 1993, the commission assisted 195 cases in industrial tribunals and the European Court of Justice.

Does the Equal Opportunities Commission need to perform those tasks? Are there sufficient research institutes, grant-giving bodies and legal help organisations to perform that function instead? If the EOC did not exist, would those bodies have performed that function?

Those are very difficult questions to be posed by a great supporter of the commission when it first started and to those who have become used to the commission. However, after 20 years, it is perhaps time to consider whether the commission is required, whether its composition needs to be changed and whether its aims and objectives need to reflect more closely the changes that have been achieved in the past 20 years.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Does the hon. Lady agree that, under article 119 of the treaty of Rome, the Equal Opportunities Commission, from its very inception, has been the most effective body by a long way throughout Europe—and I do not normally say this kind of thing—in pursuing cases in respect of which women have been badly treated? It would be a tragedy to get rid of its expertise in that area.

Mrs. Lait: I acknowledged the commission's work, however inconvenient some of us may have found the results. I am not suggesting that that body of knowledge should necessarily dissipate simply because we change the aims and objectives of the commission, or review them in such a way that we decide that we do not need the EOC as such and move its responsibilities to some other policy institute. I am simply opening up the question for debate because, after 20 years, we need to do that. If we do not do that, such things ossify and become part of the system, which does not deliver what is required given the changes that have occurred.

I apologise if my next issue was raised earlier, but I became aware of its complications very recently. That issue is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment has been

[Mrs. Lait]

an issue for action and debate in the United Kingdom. However, I became aware of it as an even more potentially difficult problem as a result of a conversation that I had recently with a retired professor of international law from the United States.

The professor told me about the realities of life in an academic faculty where the politics of sexual harassment were such that men and women found that the level and quality of teaching was being affected purely because, in any one-to-one relationship between the sexes, neither could react in an academic but at the same time friendly way.

It usually takes 10 years for ideas from America to cross the pond. I would hate it if we were to over-react to allegations of sexual harassment in future and put in place techniques and controls to deal with sexual harassment which reduced the level of academic teaching. If we did that, we would be doing ourselves a profound disservice in terms of the ability of men and women to contribute to our economic and cultural success in the United Kingdom. We must be aware that we could over-react and penalise ourselves—for all the right reasons, but taken to excess.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for posing questions rather than offering answers. However, I should be grateful if she would consider whether she can say that work will be done on some of the difficult questions that I have posed.

7.59 pm

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): At the moment, the world summit for social development is meeting in Copenhagen, and the United Nations is using the summit to highlight the problem of poverty and to discuss solutions. In Britain, as in the rest of the world, the poorest section of the population are women and their children. The UN has said that women do two thirds of the world's work for 5 per cent. of the income and only 1 per cent. of the assets.

I apologise to the House for missing a good deal of the debate, because I was chairing a meeting on the Child Support Act 1991. Representatives of the single parent action network and the Child Poverty Action Group came to tell us of their reaction to the latest statement by the Government on alterations to the Child Support Act. They told us a story of the increased poverty of women; that the Act, which was supposed to help children, has in many ways made things worse. They told us of single mothers who at lunchtime went out and bought their children a bag of chips and had nothing to eat themselves. When members of those organisations went to visit those mothers, they found their cupboards and fridges empty of food. Increasing numbers were having water and electricity supplies disconnected, and even more were self-disconnecting because they did not have the money to charge the key or card meters which they are now forced to use and through which they pay even more for electricity than those who can afford to pay a quarterly bill.

I was shocked to find that 10,000 women have already suffered the benefit penalty because they were denied the right to refuse authorisation for their husbands to be pursued for maintenance, and that 17,000 more have been denied that right. They will also suffer a benefit penalty. That means that their benefit is cut by nearly £9 a week, so that, although they are already on the poverty line, there will be even less money to feed the children. There will not even be money for the bag of chips. That is a terrible situation.

There is great pressure on those women to go out to work, but the only jobs they can find are low-paid, part-time, insecure jobs. They cannot take insecure jobs. If they do, they go on to family credit. The family credit system sets the amount that they will receive for six months, and then, if the maintenance does not come through or the job is lost, because the jobs are not secure, the women are in serious financial trouble.

It is not a victory for women to be forced to go out to work for low wages, because they then have less time for their children. Child care is very lacking in some areas. There are not enough nursery schools, there are not enough qualified child carers, and good child care is usually not affordable. Mothers who work all day have less time to go to schools for parents' day. There are all kinds of problems. It is not all hay when they go out to work, especially when they cannot earn much money.

There is an increasing stigma on single mothers on benefits and on women who stay home to look after their children. They have been attacked by many Ministers, and they are beginning to feel the stigma, because society picks it up. Teachers begin to say, "That child is a nuisance; no wonder, he comes from a single-parent family," and the women themselves are affected by it. I say here and now that there is no disgrace in a woman wanting to stay home to look after her children.

Every mother is a working mother. Every woman works, whether she works for wages or she works in the home and does unpaid work. It is high time that the unpaid work that women do was counted and valued. It is counted on, but not counted by society.

It was recently disclosed that £30 billion had been saved for the state by the work of carers. That is probably an underestimate. If we counted women's work, we would begin to see just how much money has been cut from social services, because women have picked up the pieces of the shattered welfare state.

In addition to looking after their own sick and elderly relatives, women look after neighbours when the meals on wheels fail to roll up. They do a great deal of voluntary work for churches, schools and hospitals. That work is essential for the good of the community and for the happiness of the community, but it is not valued by society. Society has very strange values, because it values the work of soldiers as productive, but it does not value the work of mothers.

The EC social charter, which is anathema to Conservative Members, asks that the maximum working week be 48 hours, but nothing is said of the maximum working week for women, which can be as much as 80 hours if they go out to full-time work, and do the shopping, cooking, cleaning, caring for children and the myriad other tasks that women have to undertake for the family. Women would be rich if they were paid for the importance to society of the work that they do, but it is not women who are rich: it is the company directors who get the fabulous salaries and the tax-free share options.

It is not only single mothers who are poor: it is children, their mothers and their grandmothers—especially their grandmothers, because most pensioners, who are mostly

women, are very poor. I am sick and tired of seeing in my constituency elderly women hovering outside the window of a butcher's shop, trying to make up their minds whether to go in, and whether there is anything that they can afford to cook.

After a lifetime of work, after living through the war, after living through the depression and after bringing up their families, women should not have to suffer that. They should not be unable to heat their homes properly, they should not have to stick to one room or sit in the kitchen, by the open gas oven as the cheapest way of heating, after a lifetime of work of value to the community.

The Government's statistics distort the reality of women and their pensions. It has been said that men retire but women tire. When women finish their paid work and finish bringing up their families, they often help to bring up their grandchildren, so that their daughters can go out and earn a bit of money. The Government are worsening the position for older women. The change of pension age from 60 to 65 will mean that women will lose £14,500 each, based on 1992 prices. It will probably be £15,000 if we base that on today's prices, and it will be even more when the change comes about.

The Government's statistics also give a false impression of occupational pensions. Only 28 per cent. of women over 65 have ccupational pensions, and 72 per cent. do not. Only 12 per cent. in a recent survey had their own pensions. When my first husband died, I received half his occupational pension. It is not true that one person can live half as cheaply as two, because the bills come in for telephone, heat and light, and they are the same as those for two people who live in a home. My position was worsened, and the position of many women is far worse than mine was.

There is also the inequity of the occupational pension going to the husband when there is a divorce, and the wife who helped him to build his career and his pension receiving nothing. I hope that that matter will be addressed, and that changes will be enacted to give women a fair deal in receiving a share of the occupational pension when there is a divorce.

Middle-class feminists have a strategy for equality, and their strategy is to get more women to the top and to hope that power will trickle down. If women have talent, it is great if they can get to the top—if they can break through the glass ceiling—but that is not the way to help the majority of women. Women in politics were not lifted up by having a woman Prime Minister, despite what some Conservative Members think.

The facts speak for themselves. Having more women at the top will not lift up the majority of women. What will address the needs of women at the bottom of the scale will be to value and to count their work in the gross domestic product and in satellite accounts.

We must stop considering the work of women to be of no value to society and allowing it to be invisible. When women's unwaged work is ignored, their waged work is badly paid. It is a reflection of the value placed upon their unpaid work. The unpaid work of women is like the base of a pyramid on which the whole economy is built, and that should be recognised by society.

More women in organisations such as the Women Count network are demanding that women's work be counted. The Counting Women's Unremunerated Work Bill, which I presented to this House in 1989, has been replicated and passed in the European Parliament, and measures based on that Bill are now passing through the United States Congress and through Parliaments in the Philippines, Trinidad, and Germany. People in many countries who have read my Bill and have come to see me are now trying to get similar Bills through their legislatures.

I shall end by quoting Juan Somavia, the chairperson of the world summit on social development which is now taking place. I shall read two quotes. First, talking in February about the unpaid work of women, he said:

"The devaluing of this work runs parallel to the subordinate status of women, since it is women who do most of this 'caring and sustaining'. To link productivity only with paid employment continues to render invisible the enormous amount of unwaged work that women do that undergirds and subsidizes all other kinds of work".

In his opening speech to the conference on 4 March, he said:

"The contribution made to society by voluntary work, artists, the elderly, and most especially, by women through unpaid household work, together with cost-free use of the environment, are in fact subsidising the economy. The women's movement is rightfully demanding that this contribution be measured, if not remunerated, to at least factor in the invisible components of an economic system that ignores the actors which indirectly deserve a share of the benefits".

It is time that society changed its values. If we value the work of soldiers more than the work of mothers, it will have an effect on how we spend our resources. Instead of money going to help the welfare of children and future generations, it will be blown up and spent on Trident and more obsolete arms for the military.

8.12 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): I apologise to hon. Members on both sides of the House for not being present for much of the earlier debate. Like other hon. Members, I was in Committee. It may be of interest to the House to know that the Committee on which I was sitting was the Finance Bill, on which six women are sitting. I believe that that is more women than have ever sat on the Finance Bill Committee before. I also had a wry smile at a note which was sent to me a few days ago, which stated that an Opposition Member was hosting the launch of a new beer in honour of International Women's Week this week. The new beer was to be called Femme Fatale.

I have some concerns about this debate in general, and they are related to two aspects. First, it is too general a debate. We could easily have done a better job had we discussed specific issues; for example the issues of health, which was raised by the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), single parents, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), education, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), or pensions and the Child Support Agency, which was raised by the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon). The issues could have been dealt with better if we had had a series of separate debates, rather than the general one that we have had today.

My second concern is that today's debate seems to be hugely negative. Many of the speeches that I have heard and the Opposition motion have been negative. I do not think that women's issues are negative—I think that they are hugely positive—and I am sorry that they have been

[Mrs. Angela Knight]

put in such a negative way. Some of the speeches have also denigrated to a considerable extent women's role in society, in this country and elsewhere.

One of the matters touched upon in the opening speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) was the number of women in the House of Commons. In many respects, I agree with her. Clearly, when about 52 per cent. of the population—and only 10 per cent. of Members—are women, there is something very much out of balance. I would like to see more women in the House of Commons, but I do not agree that a quota system is the way in which to achieve that.

In any job—whatever it might be—one must have the best person for that job. I do not think that that can be achieved by all-female lists or by all-male lists.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: But if it turns out that, in 80 per cent. of cases the list is all-male and that there are very few cases where it is all-female, what positive action can we take that is not positive discrimination, to get more people into the recruitment pool from which lists can be selected?

Mrs. Knight: I shall come to the issue of bringing more women into the recruitment pool after I have dealt with quotas. The Labour party has decided to designate my constituency as one where an all-women list will apply for selection purposes. There has been an outcry, and not just from the men. A number of well-known female Labour politicians who are local councillors believe that it is wrong to have women-only lists for my constituency. It has caused disruption in my area and division within the Labour party. I am not sure what conclusion the party will come to. Male and female members of the Labour party must feel that, by forcing upon them a selection from just one gender, the party is not giving people a true choice to select the person whom they want to represent them.

The real issue has been brought up by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). We need to get more women on to the candidates' lists for all parties. There will always be restrictions, because clearly it is always difficult to be mum and to work. If one is a mum and doing this job with all its peculiarities a long way from home—in my case it is about 160 miles away—it adds to the normal complications that we all have in trying to combine bringing up children with a career.

It is likely that we shall get far more women to sit for constituencies in the south and the south-east. It is not so likely that women—and especially mothers—will represent seats a long way north of London. When I was checking some of the facts related to the debate, I noticed—Opposition Members may correct me if I am wrong—that only two female Opposition Members represent seats a long way north of London and have small children. On Conservative Benches, there is only me. Being a mother and a Member of Parliament is one of the hardest combinations to put together.

More can be done though in bringing women into public life, by encouraging them to take part in local councils. To serve on a local council is not only very interesting, but it gives one a good taste of public life. It can be done more easily because a local council is close to home. That, in my view, is the best stepping stone, and is a way of bringing people forward into this type of role. I have noticed that the number of women on local councils has increased substantially during the past 10 years. On average, more than 25 per cent. of councillors are women and, in some councils, the proportion is considerably higher than that. That is a positive step, and I would like to see it pursued with a view to increasing the representation of women in the House.

In general, I believe that there are four ways which, put together, constitute the greatest steps that can be taken to encourage women along the way, whatever job they seek to do. Encouragement is certainly one, but education, a range of employment opportunities and creating true equality by treating men and women fairly, especially in job opportunities, are the others. Put together, those are the four ways in which true promotion of women can take place.

I do not believe that people's lives are suddenly changed because a handful of people go and do something extraordinary. People's lives change because thousands of ordinary people start to do their ordinary things in a slightly different way. That is the way in which we have seen great changes take place over time in this country, and that is how great changes will take place steadily in the future.

Let us consider the key achievements of the past decade. We have more women in work than ever before. The fact that we have managed to get so many women into jobs shows that we must be getting quite a lot right in this country. Indeed, we have more women wanting to work than almost any other country in Europe. Moreover, women take up about 50 per cent. of all further and higher education places—and education is the key.

If we educate women, we give them the skills so that they can take the opportunities that become available. It is important to note how girls are now starting to outperform boys at school. I read an interesting article in the summer, which asked whether we should consider taking boys out of mixed classes and teaching them separately, to enable them to achieve what girls of the same age can achieve. That outperformance by girls is especially noticeable in science.

Another key change has been caused by more equality in the pensions system. We can now contribute to pensions in a way that was not open to us as women as few years ago. I know that the new national targets for health have created some concern for the hon. Member for York, but the fact remains that those targets are there: in screening for breast cancer and cervical cancer. The opportunities are there to be taken up. The difficulty, as so often, is getting women to take up the opportunities available. That brings me to one of the unknown questions and quandaries. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye asked earlier, "What can we do about it?"

None the less, some of those key improvements sound good to me. They do not sound anything like the negative motion on the Order Paper. The trend in choice for women is moving upwards, too.

When I went to university in 1968 I read chemistry because it never crossed my mind that I, as a woman, could take an engineering degree. Only when I arrived at university did I realise that I should have been doing an engineering degree. When I entered the House, I asked the Library to tell me how many women entered university or other forms of higher education to read engineering in

1968. The answer was 500—only 500 in the whole country. So I feel that there was some excuse for my ignorance at the age of 18, when I did not quite know that I could have had that opportunity. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, 30,000 women a year were taking engineering degrees at university or in other forms of higher education. That is a good example of how opportunities have broadened for women.

Pursuing that line further, I asked the Library to compare the current figures for women employed in engineering and science with those from 10, 20 and 30 years ago. Again, the answers were extraordinary. The increases have been immense. In 1971, about 84,000 women in all were employed in science and engineering. In the early 1990s, the figure was five times that.

The proportion of women members of science and engineering professional institutions has increased, too, from 2.5 per cent. to 22.5 per cent. Again, dramatic improvements have taken place, because hundreds of thousands of people have gone about their ordinary jobs in slightly different ways.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): It is certainly encouraging if that is what is happening with professional institutions, but does the hon. Lady agree that it is rather appalling that the Royal Society, whose proportion of women members increased to 3 per cent. in the 1960s, still has only 3 per cent. of women members today?

Mrs. Knight: There is always a last bastion for us to break down. The proportion may be 3 per cent. now, but one wonders what it will be in 10 years' time. Just as changes have taken place in other areas, they can take place there, too. None of us can expect to win every battle on the first day that we open fire.

Let us consider some of the wider career opportunities, because we are now getting away from the traditional jobs that women were expected to do. Yes, there are still far more women then men in secretarial and clerical jobs, and in some of the caring professions, but nearly one third of the 3 million general managers in the United Kingdom are women. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere mentioned the percentage of women barristers, and indeed about one third of all lawyers are now women.

Furthermore, 29 per cent. of dentists, 29 per cent. of general practitioners, 40 per cent. of pharmacists, 26 per cent. of vets, 24 per cent. of chartered accountants and 42 per cent. of people in the media are women. The numbers are rising steadily both because of education and because of the wider job opportunities available to them.

Ms Short: Of course those figures are right, but does the hon. Lady appreciate that every woman has only one working life, so if the odds are still stacked enormously unfairly for the women who have not had the opportunities, those opportunities have gone for the whole of their lives? To say that things are changing slowly will sound a bit complacent to those who have missed out on some of their life opportunities.

Mrs. Knight: Again, that is an extraordinarily negative approach. It is not as if we were debating a situation that is much the same as it was 10 years ago. We have seen substantial changes—most of which have taken place within my lifetime, since the early 1950s—and women now have far more opportunities available to them.

One of the conclusions that ultimately emerged from what the hon. Member for York said was that the health care opportunities available for women were simply not being taken up. That also applies to the jobs market. There are considerable opportunities available that, sadly, are not taken up. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye made that point, and it is partly related to the education system in this country.

It is true that not everything in the garden is rosy, but there are far more blooms than there were a few years ago, and there will be a lot more in a few years' time.

We tend to talk about the employment situation in a fairly superficial way. We often seem to imply, "Full-time jobs good, part-time jobs bad." Yet the reality of bringing up a family means that a part-time job is often the best opportunity for a woman. It not only brings extra money into the household, but it gives her as an individual that bit of independence and freedom and the knowledge that she is earning her own way in the world, which she would not otherwise be able to do. The part-time sector in the present job market is of considerable benefit, especially to women in my constituency, who still tend to work in the textile trades.

The greatest limiter of women's participation in the work force is having children—by which I mean the presence of young children in the family. Although one can work out the logistics, it is often difficult to work out the other aspects, and to deal with the feeling that as an individual, as a mum, one ought to be there. I have not yet learnt to come to grips with the guilt and I suspect that I shall not find out how to do so until my children are grown up.

The provision of adequate and affordable child care, which is often discussed in the House, is vital to working women. Participation in nursery education has increased substantially, but there is always a doubt in my mind when it is discussed. One of my children enjoyed nursery and one did not, and even the one who went to nursery attended no more than three mornings a week. Both liked playgroup and going to Grandma's—the alternative forms of child care that are available—and I believe that to opt for nursery care alone would ultimately be detrimental to many children, especially those who, like one of mine, did not like nursery at all.

Child care and nursery education with part-time working are necessities. But another problem arises because women tend to look after not only the children but the aging population as well. It is something that women have traditionally done and managed to combine with their careers. As the population ages, the demands on women to assist the elderly will undoubtedly increase. There is no getting away from it and there is no solution, but it means that more women will be able to say categorically that for most of their lives they did not one but two jobs at the same time.

I now deal with the encouragement given to pupils at school. The encouragement given to girls will colour their view of the types of jobs that they can take when they leave school. I am greatly concerned about the careers advice given at school. Too often, it is given by teachers who left school, went to teacher training college and then went straight back to school to teach. Consequently, their careers advice tends to be limited. The expectations of teachers and parents, especially when girls are involved, are the most fundamental moving force when it comes to girls choosing the career to follow.

[Mrs. Knight]

When my teachers asked me at the age of 14 what I wanted to be when I grew up, I said that I wanted to go into industry. The school had a fit and provided me with a series of career novelettes that had wonderful titles such as "Susan Becomes a Secretary", "Nora Becomes a Nurse" and the wonderfully named "Angela becomes an Air Hostess". That was their idea of careers advice for a 14-year-old girl in the 1960s, when going into industry was not one of the things that nice girls did. There has been a considerable improvement since then, but the encouragement given to children at school and the advice from teachers can enable children to have a wider vision of the jobs available to them when they leave.

The very fact that women now make up half the young people going into further and higher education is an example of how careers advice has improved, but also of how girls are improving their skills so that they have more opportunities available to them.

The Institute of Management recently produced a report enticingly called "The Key to the Men's Club" and subtitled "Opening the doors to women in management". The recommendations set out clearly the type of policies that we should perhaps consider. It is in employers' interests to keep women in the work force and to attract women back to a company if they have left for the traditional career break. The reason why employers are especially interested to keep women is that women are reliable, responsible and accurate and, dare I say it, to a greater extent than the equivalent male work force.

The institute makes three recommendations in particular. The first is that employers should remove age limits or any unnecessary criteria to ensure that women who have taken career breaks or who are late entrants into the work force are eligible for all management schemes. The second is to ensure that women on a career break do not suffer downward mobility. The institute urges employers to keep in touch and to provide training and updating and scope for flexible working.

The third recommendation is that employers should recognise, accept and be positive about caring responsibilities and make clear their view that caring is the responsibility of all employees, not just women, and that child care support or provision should not be targeted only at women.

The companies that have signed up to those recommendations include the Midland bank, British Gas, the Bank of Scotland and Marks and Spencer, all of which are organisations that employ women extensively in a wide range of jobs. I believe that they are the sorts of policies that the House should pursue.

8.35 pm

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The House has been discussing the need to ensure that women participate at all levels in our society. It is gratifying that, with the exception of a few dinosaurs on the Conservative Benches, hon. Members have been united in recognising the waste of our nation's talents because so many women fail to reach positions of influence. The difference between the two main parties is that we have practical policies to redress the imbalance.

It was interesting to hear that the Minister who chairs the Cabinet Committee on women was not even aware of how few women have been able to take advantage—if that is the correct word—of the opportunities that the Government have made available through their child care disregard. The fact is that many of the Government's policies on women are tokenist and do not meet women's practical needs, such as the need for child care that enables them to go back to work.

As for getting more women into Parliament, again the Labour party will show the way. We will have more women in Parliament. We have learnt from the practical experience of other countries, especially the Scandinavian countries, where more than 30 per cent. of parliamentarians are women, thanks to the means that the Labour party has been advocating to get more women sitting on these green Benches.

Ms Short: On the Government Benches.

Dr. Jones: On both sides. The Conservatives will follow once we have shown the way.

Most of my remarks relate to the participation of women in a sphere in which increasing numbers are a matter of concern, not something to be applauded. I am referring to the large increase in the number of women going to prison. As of last Friday, there were 1,982 women in our prisons, which have a capacity of 1,858. The figure is up about 40 per cent. on two years ago. The increase is not a result of more women committing offences. In fact, the peak of offences occurred in 1992 before this increase in the prison population. Instead, there seems to have been a change in sentencing policy rather than an increase in crime.

More than a third of women who go to prison do so because they have been unable to pay fines for offences that would not usually warrant a prison sentence. For example, in 1993, 292 women were sent to prison because they could not afford to pay their fine for being unable to pay for a television licence.

The Home Office thinks that those figures are trivial, but hundreds of women who are not a danger to society are being put away for several weeks at a time. For those women and for their families, it is a devastating experience. Half the women in prison are mothers.

Poverty is resulting in women being sent to prison, but men too are being sent to prison for non-payment of fines. A recent study by Rona Epstein, a law student at Coventry university, showed that, of 116 people who were imprisoned for not paying the poll tax, 53 per cent. were on benefit and 14 per cent. had no income. The National Association of Probation Officers reckoned that about 80 per cent. of people gaoled for non-payment of fines are on benefit and already in multiple debt.

Some examples of people sent to prison have been highlighted by those studies, and I shall mention a few of them. An asthmatic woman with learning difficulties spent 10 days in prison for non-payment of poll tax before she was released on bail following the intervention of our very own Madam Speaker. A part-time cleaner, earning £42 a week, with five children, the youngest under five, was sent to prison for 20 days for being unable to pay her fine.

Many women who are being sent to prison are first-time offenders who have committed petty offences. Those have been highlighted by the National Association of Probation Officers.

A pregnant mother was gaoled for 21 days for stealing £380 from the place where she worked, after she had already repaid it. She had borrowed it to try to keep a roof over her children's head. A 20-year-old mother served 56 days in Holloway prison for obtaining goods worth £91 by deception; she had no previous convictions.

It would be much better to give such people non-custodial sentences than to send them to prison, where they meet other people and are likely to be exposed to a culture of drug taking. Judge Tumim has noted that, in Styal women's prison, eight out of 10 of the women take drugs. It is an offence to our society that such women are being sent to prison.

My interest in the matter was first raised by recognising that we were sending women to prison because they could not afford to pay for their television licences. A 39-year-old woman with two children was fined £200. She had a history of psychiatric treatment and no previous convictions. Her income was income support, and she had a catalogue of other multiple debts. She was sent to prison for seven days.

A 25-year-old west midlands mother of two children, one of whom has learning difficulties, was sent to gaol for 14 days. On the day that she was in court, no one was available to take care of her children. It was only after the intervention of social services that a relative in Liverpool was found to look after the children.

One can imagine the devastation that that must cause to those families, who are already living with the stress that results from poverty. That stress appears to have been growing during the past 16 years of Conservative government, as has been well documented.

Conservative Governments have allowed benefits to lag behind the general standard of living in society. The Conservative Government condone low pay, as evidenced by their abolition of the wages councils and the spurious defence of those policies by Ministers in the Department of Employment when they issue misleading statistics. Since the abolition of the wages councils, wages have decreased and are continuing to do so. Women especially find that the opportunities that are available to them offer poverty pay and mean continual stress in their lives, which means that they are unable to meet the basic needs of their families, which results in perhaps some of them being unable to pay for their television licences.

What is society's remedy? We send such people to prison. We should not tolerate that. I understand that the population in our women's prisons has become so great that crisis proposals have been made to send some female prisoners to male institutions. The Government should consider that growing problem, and should act to make it impossible for the courts to send people to prison because they are poor and cannot afford to pay their fines. In any case, it costs £15 million to send such people to prison, and in the end their fines are not paid. There are other means of making them contribute to society, and there are ways of making them contribute, to the extent that they can afford to do so, towards those fines.

I ask the Minister to consider that issue, and I ask the Government to take seriously their responsibility for the growing alienation of that section of our society that lives in poverty. Sending those people to prison is not the answer.

8.45 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) made some good arguments in the middle of her speech, but I think that the House would believe that she would be more effective if she dropped the idea of blaming everything on 16 years of Conservative government.

It is true that we should be moving past the time when people are sent to gaol because of pure poverty. If people are thought wilfully not to be paying who would otherwise be able to pay, some alternative, cheaper deterrent or way of recognising that they had done something wrong would be advisable.

The hon. Member for Selly Oak spoke about civil debts. It is worth noting that, 19 times out of 20, crime is a male offence. Drink-driving is, 19 times out of 20, a male thing. Male misbehaviour is the other side of the caring and conscientiousness that women show in fulfilling most family responsibilities.

I shall speak primarily about poverty and about Parliament. I hope that ordinary, middle-class people will forgive me for not concentrating on their problems, which have been well illustrated by others who have spoken.

One of the factors associated with caring for children and for elderly parents is that a woman tends to know more about her residential area and its problems than does the man who, if in work, tends to leave the area in the morning and return at night, and probably has a social life away from the home.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation "Inquiry into Income and Wealth" discusses the local authority areas that were the poorest in 1981 and those that were the poorest in 1991. It is interesting that, of the 15 poorest areas, five are common to the list at both ends of the decade but 10 of them make some dramatic changes. Corby was the poorest local authority area in 1981 and was a long way from the danger zone 10 years later.

Some of those changes are interesting. If we change our focus to ward level or estate level, we begin to notice a constellation of factors of failure—not purely as a result of inadequate money having been put into the estate, but because one tends to find pockets of high unemployment and some of the other problems that were well illustrated in the Rowntree report.

I quote now from volume 1 of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation "Inquiry into Income and Wealth". Among other things, it mentions

> "A cycle of 'poor parenting' resulting not necessarily from poverty, but from lack of experience of 'good parenting' themselves, inexperience because of youth, lack of understanding of the needs of children, lack of support networks and facilities, and isolation which can lead to depression and health problems."

Those who have gained most from trying to spread a checklist of good facilities, good practice and good community approaches tend to be women. When I occasionally compare parts of my constituency with parts of my wife's constituency, I begin to see a complete contrast of opportunity between a town or village of 2,000 people in south-west Surrey and 5,000 people in an estate built in the London borough of Greenwich.

On an estate on an old goods yard, which was in my constituency and is now just outside it, 5,000 people lived for five years with no pub, no post office, no church or chapel, no police officer, no bus stop and no place at which anyone could work within a mile and a half. That

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

is pulling out of people's lives many of the things that matter to them—things which lead to the natural growth of a community.

I believe that, in many of our residential areas, if we brought four or five people together—whether current parents or streetwise grannies—who would start saying what they wanted to happen, what type of activity they wanted that would be part of worthwhile activities for young people—the organised chaos of the scouts, the Boys' Brigade, the Woodcraft Folk or a junior band, or some amateur dramatics or some sports involvement—we would begin to receive a positive answer to the question that I have posed to groups throughout the country, "What do you, aged 12 or 14, do after school or after homework?" There is nothing to do in too many inner-city areas. Many of the programmes that I have talked about are run at virtually no cost, and communal fund raising could provide more and better activities. That would create a sense of hope, which may translate into better take-up of educational opportunities for women.

My borough of Greenwich comes 99th out of 109 education authorities around the country in terms of the proportion of pupils who get five GCSEs at A to C grade—the equivalent of the old O-levels. Someone must come 99th, but it need not be Greenwich. The local council should make headlines and the local press should carry headlines about that result. Parents in Greenwich should organise themselves in the way that workers would if they discovered that they came 99th out of 109 in a survey of wage levels. But we tolerate such things, and too often it is the women who carry the burden of inadequate performance by our public facilities, such as education authorities.

I praise the *Evening Standard* for its continuing in-depth study of the east end of London. It has highlighted the absence of good community facilities and the need to develop good general practitioner services. If the newspapers could spend more time examining those issues as well as education results, I think that we would see a general improvement in the situation.

More women in their teens and older must learn to appreciate the value of having higher expectations. We should look to remove barriers and embrace positive action, not discrimination. We must build competence and confidence, raise expectations and give encouragement.

One of the reasons why birth rates in countries such as Italy, Spain, France and Ireland are decreasing faster than in this country is that young women in those countries do not allow themselves to drift into a life of poverty. I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) said about people who have babies too early.

We do not inherit celibacy from our parents. However, I believe that we must overcome the embarrassment—such as that caused by a 44-year-old male Member of Parliament talking about the need for sexually active people to worry about birth control or family planning—and discuss those issues. Family planning or birth control is the last thing on the minds of most sexually active young people. If they have the option, they may consider conception control. However, this week 6,000 people will contribute to a conception which will end in abortion—6,000 did so last week and there will be another 6,000 next week. Some 300,000 people contribute to conceptions that end in abortions every year in this country.

About 45 per cent. of sexually active people in this country will contribute at some stage to a conception that ends in abortion. In a relatively open country where information is readily available and we have the opportunity to learn from our own behaviour and that of others, we should be able to halve that figure in six weeks. Our abortion record may be 10 times higher than that of the Netherlands, but it should be lower.

We must achieve some openness in this area. I believe that the approach adopted by the headmistress of a girls' school in west London could be useful. Instead of saying, "We are now going to talk about contraception," the headmistress says to her girls—who come from mixed backgrounds—"Let's first discuss for whom contraception is not relevant." The girls then discuss the matter and they decide that it is not relevant for many pensioners, everyone below the age of puberty, those who are celibate, infertile or pregnant or those who want to be pregnant. She does not suggest that it is compulsory for everyone else; she simply points out that it has some relevance. That approach signals a move away from the idea that society is looking down on a bunch of hyperactive teenagers, and it makes contraception a part of normal life.

I agree strongly that males should be part of the decision-making process as well—it takes two to tango. We need to be more open about the contraception issue. Instead of a 44-year-old talking about it on Radio 4, those matters should be discussed on radio stations, such as Radio 1, Kiss FM and Virgin, to which young people listen. As my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) said, if we can get hundreds of thousands of ordinary people to do ordinary things often it will help to transform outcomes for society.

While we must try to reduce the number of people who fall into circumstances not of their own choosing, which they do not enjoy and which may affect their lives for the next 30 or 40 years, we should have sufficiently broad shoulders, big enough hearts and enough common sense to help people in whatever situations they face.

It is often women who visit people in gaol. Some 2,000 people—mainly male—commit their first serious crime every week, which makes a total of 100,000 people per year. Some 34 per cent. of men have already been convicted of a serious criminal offence by the age of 30. They may have been sentenced to gaol for six months or more. It is women who often perform a caring role when health—mental or physical—breaks down.

Sadly, the emancipation of women has seen an increase in the smoking habit among women. If women account for half the smoking in our society, they will account for half the 100,000 who will die prematurely every year as a result of smoking.

The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) said that we must be aware of health inequalities. Part of that problem is due to inequality of behaviour, which is probably a cultural issue. We cut the incidence of drink-driving among young men by 1.5 million per week over a year and a half with no changes to the law or to sentencing or enforcement procedures. We must try to do the same thing in other areas of avoidable disadvantage, distress and handicap in our efforts to promote general well-being.

I think that we should adopt the key message in the first chapter of the Pope's new book, which essentially says: "Be not afraid." We must try to work out what we want to achieve and go for it.

I turn to the question of outcomes for children of mothers in different types of relationships. I hope that research will show whether I am correct in my belief that children are most likely to be brought up successfully—if that is defined broadly, without detail—if they are reared by widows. I think that is in part because widows know that they need to care, and in part because society is more willing to share the burdens that widows bear. I suspect that married parents are the next most successful at child rearing and that that group is followed by a mixture of those who have never married, those who are divorced and those who are separated.

That analysis is not really helpful in practice; we cannot say to children, "You will be all right," or "You are born to fail." However, it gives some guidance to people who believe that they have a choice. No one should be told nowadays that they should live with someone, marry or have children—that is a matter of individual circumstance and individual choice. I believe that if we can share information, more people will learn that they have a choice and will exercise their freedom of choice. Therefore, they will be likely to make fewer mistakes and less likely to get into undesirable situations. I agree that recognising home and work responsibilities is an important aspect that has been well covered by others.

I return to Parliament. At the risk of pre-empting my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), I increasingly believe that she was right to say that we should halve the number of constituencies and have a man and woman representing each constituency. It would save a lot of bother and provide a great deal of encouragement for people to believe that it should be relatively easy to take the chance of being elected to Parliament.

Not everybody who volunteers gets selected and not everybody who gets selected gets elected, but it is worth giving my hon. Friend's proposal serious consideration over the months and years. However, that is only one part of Parliament.

Most life peers appointed on the Prime Minister's recommendation are male, and all the judges who attend the House of Lords Appeal Court are male. At the moment, all the bishops are male, yet it should be quite easy and a matter of consensus to try to increase the number of women in the House of Lords.

At the risk of embarrassing them, it is not difficult to think of a whole range of women who would make a good contribution. I do not know the politics of any of them, but, for example, the deputy chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, June Bridgeman, who was a distinguished civil servant experienced in family responsibilities, could serve there well.

Ros Howells, who has been running the Council for Racial Equality in Greenwich, has immense experience, talent and street experience of young people, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds. She helped to reduce the avoidable distress that followed some terrible incidents in my constituency and my borough.

Hazel Treadgold is the central president of the Mothers' Union, a large voluntary organisation, which, if it were a male one, would have had its central president, or the equivalent, on the candidates' list for public appointments to places such as the House of Lords or for appearances on "Any Questions" or "Question Time", but she is invisible because women in general do not push themselves forward.

One generalisation I can make is that most men who are half qualified for a job think that they are overqualified, and most women who think they are half qualified for a job think they are disqualified, and that needs to be changed.

Margaret Harrison started Home Start, the organisation which gives support to families and helps trained volunteers to support six families with great changes in outcome. I do not see why we should not have as many such people in the House of Lords as we have people in business and employment.

Anne Frye is a current civil servant who runs the mobility unit in the Department of Transport and has declined to move from her job in the past 10 or 14 years because her contribution goes beyond statute and public provision, but knits together the mobility improvements.

Dame Sue Tinson, editor of ITN for many years, was omitted from Ginny Dougary's book on women in the media, perhaps because she was successful and had done so well. Diane Warwick of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Sheila Masters, the former financial director of the health service and Gareth Pierce, the lawyer who has shown by her competence and her willingness to take up unpopular causes that she has a contribution to make, would all be excellent candidates. We should be asking such people to come forward.

I admit to one minor disappointment: that when Emily's list promised to make awards to women in public prominence, I thought it would give one to my wife. I discovered later that only Labour women would get such recognition. If Labour Members would drop the idea to promote only women in their own party, a cross-party approach would encourage those with no politics and all kinds of politics to come forward.

Having said that, I believe that we should change the Women's National Commission into a family commission. I do not think it has done enough. There are ways to put together family policy issues and women's issues on the public agenda and keep them there.

9.2 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): When I think of equality for women, I always think of that splendid Chinese revolutionary poster of the 1950s showing a woman up a telegraph pole fixing telephone wires against a beautiful sunrise, with the slogan, "Women hold up half the sky." Women hold up more than half of our society and our economy, but they certainly do not get their fair share of pay, property, jobs and positions of power and influence or life chances. The Government's attitude is often akin to a cartoon of Andy and Florrie Capp. Andy Capp has a pint of beer and Florrie has a half pint and Andy says, "Florrie always gets her full half of what I get." It sounds reasonable, but it is not.

I want to put sex discrimination into context with class discrimination and race discrimination, as that point has been absent from the debate. They are all severe in their own right, but they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They impact on each other and compound discrimination and inequality.

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

Nearly all women are likely to face some discrimination during their lives, for example, the burden and cost of child care with the glass ceilings and stereotypes which have been mentioned. Working-class women face economic as well as sex discrimination and are likely to spend much of their lives in poverty; working-class black women are even more likely to do so. Cases arise in my work load, as in that of other hon. Members, of immigrant women brought over to be with men who either beat them up or desert them. Those women, instead of being allowed to remain here in their own right, are picked on by the state and threatened with deportation or deported. Such women are victims of sex, class and race discrimination. Specific measures are needed to overcome class and race inequality, which also holds back many women.

Low pay cuts across all forms of discrimination. The Equal Opportunities Commission estimates that 4 million women are on low pay, and the Council of Europe reported that 6.5 million women in this country fall below its decency threshold. Part-time workers are among the low-paid, because they receive only the hourly rate equivalent of 59 per cent. of male full-time earnings. The increase in the number of part-time jobs is welcome, but not the appalling pay that goes with them.

The proliferation of low-paid part-time jobs contrasts with the collapse of job sharing in better-paid work throughout the country, and the Government should explain why. A statutory minimum wage is needed, which would benefit four out of five women; otherwise, we will repeat the experience in the United States of the working poor—women employed but still in poverty and dependent on state benefits. Decently paid jobs are the key to cutting the benefits bill and to helping women.

Nine out of 10 lone pensioners forced to rely on income support are women. Only one woman in six retires on a full state pension, compared with two out of three men. The Government's proposal to raise the retirement age for women to 65 is unfair and represents indirect discrimination. Many women do not have private pensions, whereas some men do.

Mrs. Peacock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cohen: No. I apologise to the hon. Lady, but time is short.

Many women without private pensions will be compelled to go the full distance and work until they are 65, whereas many men will not. The situation surrounding occupational pensions in cases of divorce is also unfair but, as I have presented a private Member's Bill on that subject—the Pensions (Divorce) Bill—I shall not discuss it now.

Many women are damaged by Government cuts in health, public transport and education. Only yesterday, a radio programme reported that teenage pregnancies in Holland number just seven in every 1,000. The figure for England is 33 in every 1,000—five times higher. What a failure of education, which can be blamed on the Government's prudishness and cuts in family planning services.

Inadequate child care holds back many women. This country has the lowest level of publicly funded child care in the European Union. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that nine out of 10 women have access to some form of child care, but that is not true in my constituency or in the constituencies of many other hon. Members. I do not know where he gets those figures from. Child care provision is patchy to the point of being threadbare. Lack of child care is a major obstacle to a woman's ability to work and to enhance her life.

The Chancellor said that child care needs to be targeted, but it is not targeted in the poorest areas. In my area, there is a shortage of child care provision and the cost of a child minder is way beyond the means of working-class women. That means that child care provision is unequally distributed among working-class, middle-class and richer areas. I wish that it were targeted. It should be universal so that all women have access to child care.

If nine out of 10 women have access to child care, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said, it should be easy for him to make it 10 out of 10. In those circumstances, why have the Government been dragging their feet over universal nursery provision for three and four-year-olds? There should be a public sector boost to nursery provision, with local authorities providing nurseries. There should be an employment boost with businessplace nurseries and crèches. There should be a tax incentive for businesses to provide such facilities and there should be an increase in parental leave as well. That would provide a real choice for women.

Many women experience crime and a fear of crime. The Government have reduced the compensation available for women who are the victims of crime. Early-day motion 730 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) draws attention to the case of a woman who was the victim of a brutal rape and left for dead, who received compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board amounting to £76,000 because of the horrendous injuries that she suffered.

Under the tariff that the Government are introducing, a woman would receive a maximum of £7,500 if she had been raped by a single person, a maximum of £10,000 if she had been raped by two or more people and a maximum of only £20,000 if she had suffered multiple injuries and permanent disability. It is a disgrace that such a tariff should be introduced, worsening conditions for women who are the victims of such crime.

There should be improved police practice for cases of domestic violence and a major zero violence campaign. The Government should co-ordinate a network of safe refuges for women throughout the country. They have been tardy in not doing that.

Inequality under the law should also be tackled. I draw the attention of the House to homicide cases and the law of provocation. At the moment, the defence of a sudden and temporary loss of self-control applies more to men. They can plead provocation and get off with a light sentence. That often does not apply to women. The law takes no account of sustained domestic violence against women. Therefore, women often receive a life sentence for a similar offence. That is unfair; women such as Sara Thornton should not be imprisoned for life.

When I raised the case of Sara Thornton with a Home Office Minister, his attitude was, "Well, she's only a crazy woman killing a slob of a husband." His attitude was that the Government therefore need not do anything. He betrayed other traits in his thinking, but that was his general attitude. That is most unfair. Women's institutes,

the townswomen's guilds and other organisations representing millions of women have said that the law is unfair and should be changed. The Government should listen to them and change that unfair law.

In conclusion, to return to the Andy Capp analogy, I am in favour of lifting the cap of inequality on women. I want to see Andy and Florrie both with full pints and full rights, too.

9.14 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Much has been said in the debate and I commend the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), who opened the debate for the Opposition, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who pointed out the wonderful things that the Conservative party has done for women. I commend the Labour party in particular for introducing a debate on the lives of women in the UK.

The tenor of the debate has been one of gloom and doom and we have talked about all the negative things, it seems to me. I am awfully sorry if I missed some of the marvellous contributions from my colleagues and, of course, from Opposition Members. Personally, I think that the lives of women in the United Kingdom today are infinitely better than anything that has gone before, even within the lifetime of my mother and my grandparents. My mother would probably have been trapped in an unhappy marriage and would not have been able to get a divorce, because that was difficult in those days. In my grandparents' day, women had no property rights if they married; they were chattels. Barely more than two generations ago, women who were pregnant were locked up in mental institutions and the babies were taken away and put in orphanages, where they often died, conveniently, of starvation.

If one looks at parish records, one will find that as many children were born out of wedlock, as it was then known, or soon after the marriage took place, as today. I personally think that society today, with its more liberal attitude to women, and their right to a sexual life of their own, is liberating. I am not here to make a big fuss about the way in which women are victimised. I do not want to repeat the material about putting more women in this place. Of course we could get more women in this place if we had the will, as I pointed out—and I pinched the idea from Bernard Shaw. We simply need to have a man and a woman elected in each constituency. With a little adjustment of the Representation of the People Act 1985, that could quite easily be achieved, but, of course, the will does not exist in this place.

I want to say once again, as many of my colleagues were not here, that we regard this place as though it were an Olympic race, where only the best can get to the starting post, and they are the ones who get in, or some big company, where the best people rise to the top. This place is not like that. It is a jury of the nation. We are meant to be representative of the whole nation. Therefore, there should be more women here, and all sorts of other people as well. We are not—nor should we be—the crème de la crème. The women should be able to be as lazy, idle and good for nothing as many of the men in this place. Then we would know that we have real equality. That, in my view, would be success in this place.

I reject the idea of women as victims. I do not know how many hon. Members are old enough to remember that wonderful serial "The Prisoner", in which the hero said, "I am not a number. I am a person." I think of that whenever I hear these debates. I am not a victim. I am a woman. I just happen to be a woman, but that does not make me a victim. Yet so much of what has been said in the debate implies that women should be, that somehow we have to be helped, because we are underdogs. I disagree with that.

When I was being brought up, my mother always said to me, "The one thing you must be is independent." That is what we should aim for in society, to create the opportunities for independence, both in the way in which we educate our daughters and in the legislation that we enact. We could do a great deal more to help women to independence.

When I read the blurb that was put out by the Labour party on the debate, I wondered what kind of an image it has of women. It is all about women being victimised and ground down, and about part-time workers being badly treated, as though women going out to work, particularly those who choose part-time work, are all being exploited for doing so. There is another aspect to work. Wages are important, but so, too, is work satisfaction, to which, I think, women give a higher priority than men, and also the ability to contribute towards a family income. They do not necessarily put as their top priority the wage level, but rather the opportunity either to contribute, or sometimes just to get out of the home for a break, so that they can get away from their domestic routine. Jobs provide that opportunity.

I often recall, from the days when I used to battle for small businesses, the story of a firm that employed women to sew buttons on cards in the east end. I see that Opposition Members' faces are beginning to screw up in distaste. Each week, those women used to turn up to collect a bag of buttons; they would socialise, have a cup of tea and a couple of buns, then go off to stitch the buttons on to cards. They earned a few shillings an hour, and I am sure that the trade union movement would have called it gross exploitation.

In the end, the trade union had its way. The company was caught by one of the wages councils, which jacked up the pay rate—and, lo and behold, the button-carding concern went out of business. Eventually it went over to Malta. Something was achieved—a certain level of wages for those women—but the jobs were no longer there for them to do.

We keep going on about employment for low pay. I sometimes think that we imagine that the alternative is automatically high or better pay, but it is often no pay at all. Let me commend to the Labour party a more positive attitude to working women. We should bear it in mind that we are actually damaging many of those whom we are supposedly trying to help by making it more difficult for employers to take them on. That may give the Labour party something to be a little more cheerful about.

I am being heavily leaned on by the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), but I am sure that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) will grant me a couple of minutes more. The French have begun to allow tax relief on the whole cost of employing domestic assistance, which has been an enormous success, providing many low-skill women with jobs. More than a million jobs have been created in France. The scheme has enabled many highly skilled women who want to work to

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

afford the home help that allows them to do so; it has taken many people off social benefits; and the sum of human happiness has increased.

If there is one tiny contribution that I can make to the debate, it is this. Instead of um-ing and ah-ing about giving small amounts to women to enable them to pay for child care, we should decide that domestic jobs are respectable and decent employment to which women in particular may well be drawn, as they have been in the past. It is not all about little boys being sent up chimneys, or "Upstairs, Downstairs"; it is about people becoming nannies or home helps. That is a respectable way of employing women, which gives them a variety of opportunities.

I now bow to the interests of my hon. Friend the Minister and sit down, but I hope that we shall continue this debate in the future.

9.22 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I welcome the Minister to the debate, and look forward to her speech. Let me make a comment that is directed not at her, but at the Government. It is curious that the Minister responsible for animal welfare should have been given responsibility for women's welfare; I hope that the Minister is more successful in championing the cause of women than in championing that of calves in veal crates.

As the debate has made clear, nothing less than a revolution has taken place in women's lives—a social and economic revolution. It has been caused by many different factors, some of which have been touched on today; but everyone seems to agree that women's lives now are very different from those of their mothers.

Change in women's lives inevitably affects men and children. The question is whether the Government will shape public policy to take account of the effect of that revolution, or persist with policies that relate to how the world was 50 years ago. Let me list some of the changes that constitute what I have described as a revolution. The fact that women are leaving full-time education with qualifications equal to those of men, for instance, constitutes an enormous difference from the position only a generation ago.

Women are getting married later and having children later. They are having fewer children. That change in women's fertility rate is enormous. Many women are bringing up children on their own in one-parent families. With the growing number of people living to very old age, women are spending longer looking after elderly relatives. At the same time as all these changes, they are working more than they ever have. They are now about half the work force. In particular, mothers are working and the mothers of very young children are working. That means that the family has changed and that the world of work has changed. Women's role is now vital not only in the family, but in the world of work.

The present Tory Government are incapable of a sensible public policy response to this huge change for two reasons. They are divided, first, because the Tory squires—who have not put in an appearance in this debate, but who are out there and who will vote against the motion—think that women should be at home doing the cooking. That view used to be called "back to basics" and it is still a strong belief within the Conservative party. Secondly, the Conservatives are divided because the new right, in which I include the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), thinks that if the labour market wants women it should be able to have them, that it is no business of the Government's to ensure that women at work have proper protection and that everything should be left to the free market. The result is that while women are making a growing contribution to their family budget and to our economy, and are taking the lion's share of responsibilities for children and the elderly, the Government are doing nothing to acknowledge or assist women's growing role.

We know that women have a passionate commitment to their children. We take responsibility for our children and we would not have it otherwise, but women also want to ensure that their children have a decent standard of living. The family wage defined as a man's wage has all but disappeared. That has given rise to what my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) described as the dual worker household.

For many families, the mother's work is vital to the household income. That is especially the case for single mothers. Circumstances have changed, so motherhood has changed. Women are redefining what it is to be a mother, and motherhood is now about providing for one's children as well as caring for them. Over the past 10 years, the greatest increase in women working has been among women with young children. Some 64 per cent. of mothers with children under 16 are now economically active. The greatest increase in labour market participation has been among women with children under five.

The Government's response has been simply to deregulate, to remove protection, to abolish the wages councils and to leave everyone else to struggle with the mess that they have created.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that one way in which opportunities for women at work could be improved would be for creche facilities to be provided by employers, including this place?

Ms Harman: I welcome my hon. Friend's point about child care. I am sure that we shall find that his involvement in the debate on and pressure for child care shows renewed enthusiasm. I congratulate him and his wife on the birth of their baby on Thursday. We shall have a new recruit to the campaign for child care.

Women have their responsibilities and they recognise them. Men are playing a growing part in caring for their children, but progress in that respect is still slow. When it comes to looking after the children, it is still mostly down to women. Women have their responsibilities and they recognise them, but Governments also have responsibilities although the present Government refuse to recognise them. They are excellent at pointing out everyone else's responsibilities, but they seem to find it hard to identify their own. We believe that it is clear that the Government have a role in enabling working mothers to fulfil all their responsibilities. One of the Government's responsibilities is to enable working mothers to meet theirs.

That brings me to the two questions with which I should like to deal: intervention in the labour market and the role of public services. With regard to the labour

market, the International Labour Organisation concluded in its recent world employment report, which rejected the recent British model of labour market deregulation:

"The most meaningful debate is not that between deregulation versus regulation"—

that is a blind alley—

"but on the sort of regulatory reforms in the labour market that changes in the economic landscape will require."

It is the role of regulation to hold the ring, especially in the balance between work and family and to prevent exploitation at work.

Half the work force are women and most of those women are someone's mother. They do not stop being mothers when they go to work, nor should we want them to stop. Many of them bring to their work the skills that they develop when taking care of young children. Most mothers develop a number of skills, such as staying calm in a crisis, sorting out petty squabbles, doing five things at once and thinking about other people and not just themselves. I suggest that those skills would be very useful in the Cabinet at the moment. Those qualities and skills enrich the world of work, but all too often they are totally overlooked and undervalued. They are not recognised in women's pay or in their curricula vitae.

The fact of today's working life, understood only too well by women in and out of work, is that the Government make it clear that they certainly do not care and that they do not feel as a Government that they have a role to play. One of the things that Labour Members think is important is bringing fairness to the world of work. That is why we are in favour of a minimum wage.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): At what level?

Ms Harman: Women are—quite unjustly—more likely than men to be on low wages. The hon. Gentleman asks at what level. The difference between me and the hon. Gentleman is not that he wants a minimum wage at one level and I want it at another. The difference between Labour Members and the Government is that they want a spiralling down of wages and a bottomless pit while we think that there should be a floor under wages.

Women are quite unjustly more likely than men to be on low wages. Here the argument from the Government is familiar. They say that a minimum wage will cost jobs; yet the Government have admitted that Britain's unemployment growth is the third highest among other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Of those other countries, 11 out of 12 have minimum wage protection. Indeed, Britain's rate of unemployment growth was the third highest among those countries between 1980 and 1990 and the seventh highest from 1990 to 1993. If the minimum wage were a brake on employment and caused unemployment, we could have expected Britain to have the lowest unemployment in the league and the highest employment, which is simply not the case.

After those figures were revealed in answer to parliamentary questions tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), the Minister wrote to the *Financial Times* saying that the United States minimum wage was rubbish and that it did not count because it was only $4.25 per hour and thus extremely low. That figure is the equivalent of £2.70 an hour in Britain and 500,000 women who work part time get less than that extremely low rate. Does the Parliamentary Secretary think that it is acceptable that 500,000 women working part time get less than £2.70 an hour? Is she prepared to justify the fact that 75,000 people in this country—most of them women—earn less than £1.50 for an hour's work?

How low will the Tory Government go? They have abolished the wages councils, which put a floor under wages in many industries and services in which women worked. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said, women pay the price with lower wages. Something which should particularly concern the right wingers and the new right of the Conservative party is that the taxpayer pays the price, too, in more than £2 billion in benefits such as family credit, income support, council tax benefit and housing benefit to top up the low pay of people working for employers who will not pay decent wages.

We have been here before as far as those arguments are concerned. The arguments against a minimum wage come from exactly the same quarter as the arguments used against the introduction of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and we remember them well. At that time, the Confederation of British Industry said that there would be enormous inflation as a result of that Act. That certainly did not happen. The CBI said that women would be driven out of the labour market and back into the home if employers were forced to pay them the same as men. That also did not happen. The statistics show a completely different story and there are now more women at work than ever before.

We hear the same scaremongering in relation to the national minimum wage. The next Labour Government will introduce a national minimum wage in a sensible way. We will not pluck figures out of the air in response to interventions from Conservative Members who are against a minimum wage in principle. We will introduce a minimum wage in consultation with employers and trade unions and in the light of economic circumstances. The Government are arguing against a national minimum wage, not because it will cut jobs but because they are in favour of low pay. They always excuse it; they never condemn it.

I want to refer briefly to trade unions because several Conservative Members said that there are not enough women general secretaries in the trade union movement. I agree with that. However, I believe that the trade unions have a new and important relevance for women at work. As my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) said, women are now being asked to work on zero hours contracts. How does one organise one's household budget on a zero hours contract? How does one organise one's child care on a zero hours contract? How does one organise one's family relationships on a zero hours contract when one is at the beck and call of an employer at the end of a telephone? One cannot do those things.

The Government may say, "The world has changed—who needs trade unions?" We say that the world has changed and the two women working in a dry cleaning shop now need trade unions as much as the 200 men in a large factory need trade unions. Forty-four per cent. of women work part time and 63 per cent. of working mothers work part time. Yet the Government refused to give equal rights to part-time workers. They have been forced to act only by a judgment from the European Court. They have been dragged kicking and screaming to make that change. With a growing number of part-time

[Ms Harman]

jobs, and a growing number of men who, having lost full-time jobs, cannot find full-time work and have to work part time, part-time work is now a very important issue.

I want briefly to consider child care. When a mother is at work, someone has to look after her children. In the past, that person was her mother or her mother-in-law. However, as the extended family is becoming rarer, that is becoming less frequent. We must take account of the disappearance of the family wage and, to a large extent, the disappearance of the extended family. With women at work, and less extended family around to help—including mothers and grandmothers—it is very important that the Government should introduce a choice of high-quality, affordable child care.

That is why Labour is committed to a national child care strategy. We would like to go further. When we are in government, in addition to a national child care strategy building on the work of Labour councils, we will develop a childnet system where women will be able to use the information super-highways and the new technology to find their way through the interlocking maze of benefits, training and job availability and child care to help them get back to work after they have had their children. A pilot project has already been set up in that respect by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), and I wish her work well.

It is not only the care of children which must be newly reconciled with the world of work. We must also consider the care of the growing number of elderly people. Women are working, people are living longer, and most people want to take as much responsibility as possible for the older people in their families. In that respect, as with children, most people feel that responsibility lies first and foremost with the family, but it should also rest on the employer and the community as a whole to recognise the number of roles that women are playing.

An aging mother is a responsibility for her daughter, and she should be for her son, too. It is right also that there should be a framework of rights at work which recognise the need for leave for family reasons. It is right that the local community, through the council and voluntary organisations, should ensure that there is help in the form of respite care or domiciliary services.

A Social Security Minister put his head above the parapet and appeared to criticise British companies which demand the longest full-time working hours in Europe. He said:

"Too many companies and businesses demand outrageous time commitments from those who work for them, without thought of the damage to family structure or for the strength their employees would get from a sound family life if they are allowed to foster it."

I totally agree with those words, but I fear that they will get nowhere, because they contradict the fundamental Tory principle that there is no such thing as society, that the market is always right, and that it is no business of Government to intervene in the labour market or to provide public services.

The Government cannot have it both ways. They cannot at one and the same time tell women to be good daughters, good mothers, good employees and good providers for their children and yet refuse to provide child care and care for the elderly, and deny legal rights for women at work. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) said, women can be and are being at one and the same time good mothers, good daughters and good employees, but the Government and employers need to recognise that women are doing all those things and to make the necessary changes to take that into account.

The Government should understand what women are actually doing, look at how our role has changed, and make sure that public policy, both in employment and in our public services, takes that into account. The evidence is clear: the Government are not agonising about how to improve the conditions of women at work; they are deliberately pushing them down. For example, a minimum wage would benefit women; the Government say no. A right to union representation would benefit women; the Government say no. Proper employment rights for part-time workers would benefit women; the Government say no. Proper child care provision would benefit women; the Government say no. Above all, the Government are saying no to recognising women's changing and growing role and responsibility. In so doing, the Government are denying and abdicating their own proper role and responsibilities to women in this country.

I urge hon. Members to support our motion.

9.42 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): I am delighted to take part in the debate. I shall refer in a moment to contributions that have been made this evening—I have listened to all of them—but I start by mentioning my new appointment as Government co-chairman of the Women's National Commission.

The Women's National Commission exists to ensure, by all possible means, that the informed views of women are given due weight in the deliberations of Government. It was established in 1969, in line with the request of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to member Governments, to consider setting up national commissions on the status of women.

The founders of the WNC rightly recognised the huge diversity of women's interests. They are represented today by more than 60 member organisations throughout the country. They include not only a cross-section of political parties, voluntary and religious groups but a geographical spread across the United Kingdom.

Over the past 25 years, the WNC has provided a forum for a wide range of women to voice their views. It has produced a number of stimulating and forward-looking reports and guides, and I look forward very much to my involvement with the WNC. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Baroness Denton, who has worked very hard and closely with the WNC. I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the enormous amount of work done by the present co-chairman, Maureen Rooney, from the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union. She will shortly be replaced by Liz Bavidge, a former president of the National Council of Women. I very much look forward to working with both in the months to come.

This has been an interesting debate. We have discussed politics, sex and religion, and it has been quite stimulating. We kicked off with a comment on religion from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), who drew attention—in an unnecessarily disparaging way—to the religious preference of my

hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment. I was also disappointed that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) found it necessary in her opening remarks to make some personal comment about my progress on veal crates.

Ms Harman: It was a joke.

Mrs. Browning: I am sorry. We have not had much humour from Labour Members this evening. When it came, it was rather late and I did not recognise it. Perhaps when I finish with the veal crates, I shall start on pussy cats.

The debate started off with the usual complaints and whingeing about what the Government were not doing. There was a somewhat negative and disappointing tone in most of the speeches—with one or two exceptions—by Labour Members. They had nothing new to say, and simply criticised the Government. Labour Members were unable to put forward any new policies, and they were certainly unable to address the future role of women. We heard one or two history lessons about the first world war and the state of women at that time, but nobody put forward any ideas on how women had progressed or on the way in which equality for women could be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), who is a member of the Federation of Business and Professional Women—a member of the WNC—made a wide-ranging and interesting speech, and we look forward to her study of family credit disregard operations in her constituency. I agree with my hon. Friend's opposition to quotas for women's representation in the House of Commons. I shall come to that matter later, as it was mentioned this evening by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Female Opposition Members, of course, supported the quota plan, but very few male Opposition Members supported it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen referred to education and the need for women to use their qualifications to access the many opportunities which exist. She also mentioned the glass ceiling in relation to women in management, and that was touched on by other hon. Members. Many people recognise that that ceiling has been raised, but it is still there. Hon. Members pointed out that one of the ways in which women can overcome the ceiling is to take their qualifications and experience and set up their own businesses. There is a very strong sign of an increase in the number of women running their own businesses and in the number of self-employed women. Some 25 per cent. of self-employed people are women.

It has been interesting to see how women have managed their businesses during the difficult years of the recession. In the main, women have come through rather well, and that shows some of the qualities of women which have been mentioned in the Chamber tonight. Women do tend to cut their cloth accordingly, and they bring into business, political and professional life a range of qualities which many people very often associate with the skills of running a home. Those skills can be very valuable when used in a business or professional situation.

It is for that reason that a woman running a business in difficult economic circumstances will very often wait until she is making a profit before deciding to buy an expensive car. Occasionally, a man decides that he needs the expensive car up front for his image. Women are running their businesses well, and are contributing to the economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen said that she had set up an old girls' network. I am not a member of that; perhaps I am too old even for the old girls' network. None the less, such networking and interrelationships between women can give them encouragement.

We have heard tonight how women often lack confidence, and that is why there are now many schemes, often run by training and enterprise councils and local enterprise councils, to help women who have been out of the employment market for a long time to get back into employment. Those women may be out of work, not because they lack the skills or the ability to get a job but because all too often they lack the confidence to decide where they are going, so they are given practical help to get them back into employment.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) mentioned local democracy, and outlined to the House the way in which local authorities could use their money to promote gender equality. However, I must suggest to her that her colleagues on Avon county council might have been better advised to spend their money on the boy scouts, whose budget they have just cut, rather than giving additional funding to a group of lesbians in Avon. That is not the sort of gender discrimination that we would like to see in the Chamber.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: My understanding is that what the Minister says about Avon county council is incorrect, but in any case, is she aware that Avon is 300 miles from my Sheffield constituency?

Mrs. Browning: If the hon. Lady is saying that, uncharacteristically, Avon county council is putting boy scouts before lesbians, all Conservative Members will welcome that. Of course I do not hold her personally responsible for Avon's decision if she lives 300 miles away, but that decision was typical of the way in which the Labour party prioritises gender and the way in which it uses public money.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): As a Member who represents a Bristol constituency in the county of Avon, I must tell the Minister that her assertion is entirely wrong. I am sure that she would not want to mislead the House by what she says about the county council, so I hope that she will withdraw her comments until she has checked her facts. Furthermore, Avon county council is a hung authority, so I do not know how even she can blame the Labour party for what happens in such an authority.

Mrs. Browning: I hope that the hon. Lady is proved right; I shall certainly check the facts. But as someone who does not live 300 miles away from Avon—indeed, as someone who has lived very close to it—I hope that what she says means that the authority is not, as in previous years, spending money on gym mats for lesbians.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) made a considered speech, including a moving appeal on an issue that she has brought to the Chamber more than once—the rights of adoptive mothers. She will be disappointed that I cannot give her a positive response this evening, but I know that her words will have been heard, and I also know how strongly she feels on that subject.

[Mrs. Browning]

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) also raised an important issue. It was interesting to hear that my hon. Friend will attend the conference in Beijing in September. He has a reputation in the House for taking a great interest in the question of world population and for having a great knowledge of that subject, and his determination to ensure that the agenda in Beijing addresses the issue of choices in childbearing for women was most encouraging.

The conference is to be held in a place where the human rights record, especially for women and even more so on the difficult issue of choices in childbearing, is likely to make the subject matter sensitive for the host country. I was most encouraged to find that my hon. Friend has been working hard to ensure that the matter is not swept under the table simply because of the venue for the conference.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) mentioned home workers and related her information and concern to days gone by. Of course we are concerned. I am sure that she will be aware that the number of home workers has doubled, but they are not all doing the grindingly difficult jobs for low wages, as she described. However, for those working at home the health and safety legislation still applies. If there are cases in her constituency which give her cause for concern and which should perhaps be brought to the Health and Safety Executive, she is welcome to write to us and we shall take the cases further.

Ms Harman: The Minister mentioned grindingly low pay. Will she answer the question that I asked in my speech? Does she think it acceptable that at least 75,000 people in this country, most of them women, are working for £1.50 an hour?

Mrs. Browning: I can assure the hon. Lady that the Government will not shop jobs for women by introducing a minimum wage which, as the deputy leader of the Labour party explained some time ago, would mean a shake-out or loss of jobs, especially jobs for women. I hope the hon. Lady will accept that there is nothing so grindingly impoverishing as having no job at all.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who made an important contribution, especially with reference to crime. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who all made considered contributions, distinguished by the fact that they contained ideas for future policies for women. They gave upbeat messages outlining the way in which equality and opportunities for women could be accessed. Their message was in stark contrast to that of the Labour party.

The main theme throughout the debate has been the issue of more women Members of Parliament. Those of us who have put ourselves before a party selection committee know that getting here can be a very long-term plan. It took me nine years to get to the House. Very few people get here having decided to try overnight; one has to be dedicated to the idea and hang on in there, even when the chances look slim.

However, I would still rather follow that route than be the token woman when a selection committee has had to choose between three different women. In those circumstances, one is chosen on the basis not of ability but of gender.

Ms Short: Does the Minister think that all the men who sit in this place and who were selected from all-men short-lists are token men?

Mrs. Browning: If men put themselves up for selection against women and other men, I am sure that some of them will find themselves on an all-men short-list. However, it should not be a question of tokenism or bringing women forward artificially. If such women come to the House, they will be pointed out as having got here not on their merit but simply because of how they were born.

The Labour party believes in tokenism but, during its leadership elections, some women Labour Members wrote to *The Guardian* to explain that they were backing not the woman candidate—a very able woman—but the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who is now deputy leader, because they felt that he represented women better. One has to question the value of that sort of tokenism.

We have had an interesting and lively debate, but I would say to the House that, if that is the best that the Labour party can do for women, the country will look elsewhere, as it did at the last general election—to the Conservative party.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 267, Noes 294.

Division No. 96] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair

Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Barbara Roche and
Ms Tessa Jowell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas

Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sidney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes with approval the progress made in the United Kingdom towards equality and increasing opportunities for women, as described in the United Kingdom National Report for the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women; and calls on the Government to continue the policies which have made this possible.

Information Super-highway

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I welcome the opportunity to raise the subject of the information super-highway—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I ask hon. Members to leave the Chamber quietly, so that we may hear the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen).

Mr. Allen: I hope that I am allowed injury time for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is unfortunate that I have to raise this matter in an Adjournment debate, and sad and typical that the Government have not found time to debate this important issue. The significance that the Government attach to the information super-highway is reflected by the fact that I, as a Back Bencher, have been left to raise the issue.

Seizing the advantages of the super-highway is possibly the most important issue facing our nation. It could massively change for good the way that we work, live and play. It is a pity that the Government's response has been piecemeal and uninspired. They seem overawed. They appear to be saying, "Let us leave it to the market and hope." As in most things, the market is a good servant but a poor master.

Labour accepts that the Government have a role to play in exciting the public about the possibilities of the super-highway, giving confidence to potential users and giving confidence to business. The Government have a role in providing leadership and vision. Al Gore has provided that in the United States, and even Newt Gingrich had his say. In this country, Government thinking has been contracted out to the great winner of friends for any project—the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), whom I am delighted to see in his place.

Who is co-ordinating strategy? Who has the vision for the information super-highway? Why are the Prime Minister, the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for National Heritage silent? We have drift, when a once-in-a-millennium chance has come along.

Soon a new Labour Government will take on the task that the present Government have neglected. We must first ensure that the information super-highway is everybody's property. People must understand that it is not merely jargon but can deliver real things for them. I have in mind Susan Smith—an isolated, 16-year-old single mum on a tough estate in my constituency. She has no parental support, and is trapped at home watching a stream of imported soaps. Can she use her television remote control to access information on nursery provision, basic nutrition, parenting skills, health care appointments and even training for work? That is the Susan test. Unless the super-highway works for Susan, it will be little more than a tool for a small elite.

Few Susans and even fewer politicians will use the technology if it is dry and requires a PhD to operate. It must be easy and fun—not intimidating and technical. That was brought home to me in a personal revelation at the national gallery last week. When I visited the micro gallery, I accessed some of the nation's greatest paintings merely by touching the screen. There was not even a mouse or a keyboard to negotiate. Even I could call up a Monet or Rembrandt and read about its history, context and life of the artist. The gallery has taken two of our most daunting cultural features—high art and high technology—and transformed them into something fun and entertaining. I was so busy enjoying myself that I did not realise that I was being educated at the same time.

The technicians would call the technology a CD-ROM; to me it was understanding for the first time a part of my culture and a part of myself, and it revealed to me that every elector and every child at school in the land can and should own our heritage and walk into the national gallery at will.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that much of the money that has gone into schools for computers and IT equipment has come from grants for education support and training, and that it is a great disappointment to us all that that funding is to be reduced from £270.6 million in last year's Budget to £250.1 million in this year's Budget? That will mean a reduction in computing equipment in schools and certainly no money for training teachers, which is the other important aspect of ensuring that all our children benefit from the great revolution in high technology.

Mr. Allen: That reminds me of what my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) says about sport—that it is all right for the Government to talk about sport for all, but then they do away with the very playing fields that are necessary in order to teach our youngsters the basics of sport. In exactly the same way, we would hope to seek a partnership between local authorities and education authorities and the new techniques and concepts. It is impossible for the Government to work in partnership with the private sector when, as my hon. Friend pointed out so accurately, they talk about access to the new technologies but then stop schools by the very cuts that they have introduced.

But back to the national gallery and accessing the immense cultural possibilities of the great artists' exhibition there or understanding for the first time the beauty of Shakespeare without a thicket of scholarship getting in the way and finding one's way around such marvellous things. Perhaps we should have a CD-ROM about the House of Commons and democracy—if I may link those two.

Equally, single mums and politicians should be able to understand their tax and social security position and how to access local and central Government services. Unless the Government take the lead on the information super-highway, such things will happen more slowly or, worse still, not at all. That is why we have set up a Labour party policy forum on the information super-highway under the auspices of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). *[Interruption.]* Rather than make garbled and rambling comments from a sedentary position, as we have come to expect from Conservative Members, they should e-mail their views to me. My number is Lp-mm@geo2.poptel.org.uk. I look forward to Conservative Members sending me their views on Labour's super-highway. Even the Under-Secretary of State may wish to participate in that, as I know that he is not allowed to participate in broader policy making on the information super-highway.

[Mr. Allen]

We could do worse than use Parliament as our first model, symbolically to show that we in this place are committed to the information super-highway. Every Member of Parliament should be provided with access to the Internet, if they so wish, and facilities for sending e-mail just as they now send letters or use the telephone.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My hon. Friend will have seen the report last summer of the Select Committee on Information, in which we pointed out that the House is the only Parliament in the whole of Europe, bar that of Turkey, which does not have a fully fledged network. That is extraordinary, especially when many local authorities have gone way ahead of the House. Does not my hon. Friend think that it is time that we drove those technologies through much faster than is happening at present in order to give such a lead to the community outside?

Mr. Allen: Very much so. I commend the work that has been done by my hon. Friend and, indeed, by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). It should not be done by entrepreneurs, be they Conservative or Opposition Members, but rather it should be organised by the House and encouraged by the Government, not least because it would allow citizens and electors far better access to their Members of Parliament. We should be wary of looking at snap referendums through electronic means, but we should look at the possibility of allowing interaction between a Member of Parliament and his or her constituents, or direct e-mailing on certain occasions. The ingenuity of Members of Parliament could be tested. I am sure that they would come up with some excellent ideas.

But everybody needs some encouragement, even Members of Parliament, and it is a matter for the Government and the Lord President to kick the system into action in the House of Commons, so that we can start to set an example for our colleagues outside.

The same is happening in local authorities. Despite the dead hand of centralism that lies heavily on them, authorities from Bristol to Newham—I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) in his place, and to give way to him.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and for mentioning the Newham initiative. He is aware that that initiative is a partnership between the London borough of Newham, the Metropolitan police, Olivetti and a number of European cities, and is aimed at developing multi-media access to public services. Will my hon. Friend join me in commending the ATTACH project and express the hope that it will secure the funding from the European Union that has been applied for?

Mr. Allen: I am delighted to say that I have visited the ATTACH project. Despite the fact that Newham is co-ordinating a tremendous project, how much better it would be if London followed the example of Manchester and had a co-ordinated strategic authority, which, instead of having people competing against each other for a limited pot of cash, sought to have a strategy for its capital city, like every other capital in Europe. On the European dimension, I know from my own experience of trying to obtain RECHAR money for former coal mining areas in my constituency, that the Government, because of their ideological block, often stand in the way of cities and regions making the best of the European money that is available. We need a Government who will facilitate and encourage the use of European money, not one who get in the way and hand it out piecemeal, as dogs fight over a bone.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) will be aware of the Cambridge experiment. There are also experiments in Manchester, Newham, Bristol and elsewhere. Manchester in particular is leading the way with an electronic post office, called Manchester HOST, and several electronic villages, which provide affordable access for small business and the local community to electronic mail, bulletin boards, on-line databases, access to the global Internet and training in cyber skills. I am afraid that, by comparison, London looks rather sick. London could do far better if it was given the right encouragement and local government structures by an incoming Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury told me the other day of another example of the way in which this is all beginning to work. He told us that, on a recent visit to Los Angeles, within days of the earthquake, 700,000 people were teleworking from home using computer networks. Many still are. Those are just some of the many examples on our doorstep and around the world of how we can use the ability to communicate interactively, which is what the super-highway is all about.

Unless we encourage those developments, there will be an ever-wider gap between the information poor and the information rich, not only in our own country but, possibly, internationally. The South African deputy President recently revealed that half the people in the world had never used a telephone and that Manhattan Island has more lines than the whole of sub-Saharan Africa.

So what are the aims of the next Government? First, we should construct a truly nationwide network. We do not want a network that covers two thirds, or even three quarters, of the country. The beauty of the concept and practice of the super-highway is that, while it must be national, it can equally be very local and, indeed personal. We want to encourage genuinely local services—for example, local television channels—as well as the genuinely national services encompassed by the super-highway. The role of a Labour Government—a role abrogated by the Conservatives—will be to use the opportunities that are opening up to deliver maximum social benefits.

We want to build on the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), and use the recommendations of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry as the basis for the United Kingdom super-highway. I understand that the House may be given an opportunity to debate a Bill dealing with the subject next week. We shall continue to work intimately with BT and the cable companies, seeking a mutually satisfactory agreement.

This will not require millions of pounds of Government expenditure. Businesses and the next Government know that the information super-highway will create many lucrative markets. Multi-media applications, CD-ROM and portable and digital equipment are all potential job creators and profit makers. The money is there: those companies are willing to invest huge sums to construct

a super-highway. Amazingly, however, the Conservative Government have failed to cultivate that co-operation and make use of their combined power and resources.

The Government's lack of energy and their procrastination cause uncertainty for investors and planners, and deter research and development. All those concerned know that we shall put that right, and build a partnership that works.

Secondly, we need a network that not only links business to business and provides home entertainment, but ensures the public good of every school, library, GP's surgery and citizens advice bureau that is linked to it. As an incoming Government, we have been working very closely with the cable companies, and I am delighted that the Cable Communications Association has decided that it will automatically provide every school that cable companies pass with a free connection. It has freely committed itself to a public service obligation, which is good business sense as well as good community relations.

All the companies providing the infrastructure know that schools, libraries and so forth create future users and purchasers, and a source of future markets for their new services. We as a Government will give companies a tremendous opportunity to make money over a long period, and by encouraging them to build infrastructure, we shall ensure their place in the markets of the future. The quid pro quo—the planning gain—is the maximising of social benefits for the community as a whole.

An example of that principle—a social contract in operation, perhaps—can be seen in the state of New York. It was ensured there that whoever won the highly desirable franchise for Manhattan would also pay into a fund to cable the south Bronx, and as a result of that policy New York is now working towards a state-wide cabling network. What can be done in the United States can be done here, too.

Our third objective is an open access system. The super-highway builders accept that they should not prevent the suppliers of services having access to their network. They should, of course, be entitled to charge a reasonable rent for the use of infrastructure. Here, sadly, the outgoing Government seem to be stuck in the 1980s. The thinking has now switched from infrastructure to services, from holes and poles to easy-to-use applications; but the Conservatives are rooted tc the spot, yearning for the ideological certainties of the 1980s rather than thinking through the challenges of the future. There must be a common carrier purpose for the infrastructure, with services being separately provided.

We also need to address the difficult question of regulation of content. Existing regulatory frameworks may suffice for services and conventional cabling, but the Internet throws up particular problems. I recently visited the innovative Cyberia café in Whitfield street in London and spoke to some young people who are, in many ways, the most avid users and the pioneers of the Internet. They were desperately keen not to see the unlimited horizons of the Internet closed down by censorship. An incoming Government, particularly a Government committed to reinventing democracy in the United Kingdom, should associate themselves closely with such sentiments. However, crimes such as racial hatred, pornography and defamation can never be tolerated in any section of society. Although existing law should be employed to tackle those problems, if and when they arise on the information super-highway, the Government also need to initiate a broad review of the relevant legislation to ensure that there are no loopholes or inconsistencies.

There is a great deal more to say on the information super-highway. However, I am conscious of the need to leave some time for the Minister to reply. I hope that the Minister has gained something from his experience at the G7 summit last week. I was delighted that he went to the summit. Equally—this is no reflection on him—it was inappropriate that we did not send someone at Secretary of State level or even at Prime Minister level. If the Americans could send Al Gore, the creator of the vision of the super-highway in the United States, it was inappropriate for the Minister alone to have gone to the G7 summit. Labour will have different priorities. We will ensure that the information super-highway works for everybody.

10.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): We have had an interesting session, for 20 minutes or so, on the super-highway, although the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) did not appear to have picked up any information on his travels along it. For a start, he does not appear to realise, despite the numerous questions that he has tabled and I have answered, that I am co-ordinating Government policy on the information super-highway and the information society. The many initiatives that I have announced to the House are now well advanced and are showing just how active the Government are.

As the hon. Gentleman kindly mentioned, I was the Government's representative at the G7 talks. It was interesting that the speeches and contributions that I made during that weekend got a great deal of support and approval from the other Ministers round the table. Indeed, they recognised that the British Government's policy of liberalising information technology, privatising the telephone industry, increasing competition and encouraging alternative infrastructures was the basis of policies that we, as the G7, then adopted.

It was interesting that Vice-President Al Gore dropped in, made a speech and then went on to do other things. Secretary Ron Brown of the United States was especially encouraging of the British position and went out of his way to be very supportive of the policies that we have initiated. I did not feel any sense of embarrassment about being the only British Minister. Indeed, that was an advantage because I understood how Government policy was being co-ordinated. Nor do I feel that Britain was in any sense under-represented, given that the conclusions of the G7 talks exactly underlined the British Government's success over a period.

The hon. Gentleman should first understand that the super-highway is no single entity. It is not a motorway-building programme which one must try to build to every corner of the country in the same fashion, with the same number of lanes. The super-highways are interconnecting channels—interconnecting networks. They are often unpredictable in the way that they interconnect and they frequently use different technologies. There is a mix, for example, of broad-band cable and co-axial and twisted copper pair. Each has a function on the super-highway and each has applications. There is the use of satellite technology and there is

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

increasing use of the radio spectrum. There are already two companies licensed in the United Kingdom to use the radio spectrum for telephone links. I intend to announce details of further programmes, given the success that we are having with the efficient use of the radio spectrum.

In each of those technologies, there are solutions. For example, the way in which one connects rural areas in the country into the super-highway is not necessarily by digging trenches and putting down cables. It may be much more suitable to link with the radio spectrum and we are looking at that, especially in rural areas. It is also possible to say that as more than 90 per cent. of British people are already connected to the telephone they are already connected to the super-highway. Indeed, one may access Internet without having to have optical broad-band fibre. I fully accept that it is slow, but it is possible. Many surfers of the Internet out there are not connected with broad-band fibre.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Taylor: I have only a few minutes, so if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not accept an intervention. There are only about four minutes left and there are many things to say.

Mr. Miller: The Minister does not know the answers.

Mr. Taylor: The trouble is that I have too many answers and too little time in which to give them all.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North talked about the need to connect to educational institutions, hospitals, and so on, and I fully accept that. I would be the first to encourage the roll-out of the super-highway connections to schools, hospitals and so on, but it is already happening. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the Cable Communications Association is committed—as, incidentally, are BT and Mercury as a result of the pressure that we have put on them to connect up. I announced that information to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry well before the hon. Gentleman caught up with it and made a subsequent announcement.

It is important to recognise that the policies that we have encouraged to liberalise the industry have encouraged massive private investment. The hon. Gentleman must give due credit to the fact that the policies that we have pursued have released exactly the sort of level of investment—the cable industry has invested £10 million this decade and £2 billion this year, BT is investing more than £2 billion this year and several other network providers are also investing money—which means that Britain is now getting the sort of connections that are essential and which are the pre-condition for rolling out into the institutions. One cannot simply envisage connections to institutions unless there is proper commercial use of the whole super-highway.

The hon. Gentleman then talked about applications. The one purpose that we have had in Government in recent months is to try to bring the industry together in the multi-media industry advisory group, the formation of which I announced in the Command Paper in November. That group is now working extremely hard on proper applications, which industry can assist Government in developing. The big point is that many of the companies which are active in the multi-media industry, previously very diverse and which often did not talk to one another, are now looking at ways in which they can co-operate to bring multi-media to users such as schools, hospitals, and so on, as well as to people in their private homes. One of the problems at the moment is that the super-highway is capable of carrying a great deal more capacity than there are current commercial applications for use of it.

One of the areas in which I think that, as a result of the G7 summit, we have most prospect for encouraging British industry is to use the UK, in its fairly advanced state in the super-highway, to act as a test bed for the development of applications which may be used in the rest of Europe as Europe rolls out its own liberalisation programme. We managed to persuade other nations in the Telecoms Council in November to liberalise infrastructure and voice telephony by 1 January 1998. That provides a terrific opportunity for British industry to compete in those markets.

The hon. Gentleman clearly lacks a very great deal of information so I invite him to ask me further questions through the Internet or in the House. My e-mail address is taylor@mintech.demon.co.uk. I was the first Minister to be on e-mail and I am delighted so to be. Plenty of my Conservative colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), have pioneered a great deal of Internet use as sitting Members of Parliament and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) has done a great job in trying to link up Parliament.

Things are happening in this country and we ought to give credit to the industry which is doing it. The Government are working very closely with industry to develop this. We have nothing to hide our head in shame about—the very opposite. The proof of the pudding is that the G7 is now adopting British policies, which the hon. Gentleman's party has frequently contested. I have not heard the Labour party consistently supporting liberalisation of telecoms since the early 1980s for a start. Without liberalisation, one cannot simply have the development of the super-highway. A combination of low costs of telephone communications, which is a result of the liberalisation and now accepted by all the rest of the G7 countries and by all the rest of the European Union, with ever-increasing computing power, is how the super-highway has developed.

We have a proud record and one which I believe the country will benefit from in competition with other countries. British industry will develop competitively and help our export position. There is no doubt that the people of this country, wherever they live, will find that the super-highway is available to them and the applications which will be commercially attractive to them will be available in our schools, hospitals, homes and businesses.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me a chance to explain to him how far advanced we are with the information super-highway and I am glad that he is trying to catch up.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 8 March 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Prince's Youth Business Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

10.4 am

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I am grateful to the procedures of the House of Commons for Adjournment debates and for enabling me to obtain this first debate of the morning on the work of the Prince's Youth Business Trust. The trust particularly interests me because I am chairman of the Conservative party's Back-Bench smaller businesses committee, although the comments that I shall make today are not designed to be of a partisan or political nature.

I have also started a small business, and have helped others to start small businesses. For many years, I have passionately believed that this country will succeed not only as a result of large businesses but of enhancing opportunities for people to develop small businesses, which are increasingly being shown to be the future for many people and are, indeed, providing many opportunities for them.

As Members of Parliament, we are privileged to see and learn about many projects designed to help to improve the lives of people in our nation. Some of those projects are not always successful. Indeed, some do not even get off the drawing board. Some projects do not always help the people that they are intended to help, and some projects produce short-term benefits and have no lasting long-term impact.

None of those problems applies to the Prince's Youth Business Trust, which has now helped some 25,000 young people to start their own businesses. It has demonstrated success, it has gone from the ideas stage to the achievement stage, and it has shown that its benefits are long-term.

The purpose of my debate is to draw attention to the achievements and success of the Prince's Youth Business Trust, which was started by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales just over 10 years ago as a youth business initiative. It was his Royal Highness's idea, and he has been a very active president who is frequently seen at meetings and exhibitions associated with the trust.

Some may ask why the Prince's Youth Business Trust is necessary. Youth unemployment in this country exists under all Governments, and no Government have succeeded in avoiding the problem. Although the United Kingdom has one of the lowest levels of youth unemployment in Europe, it is still significant, and I hope that all hon. Members will always consider good, new ideas to deal with the problem. There is also an increasing recognition that young people need help to take their first step up the ladder. They need some form of assistance to show them the difference between a life of education or a life, perhaps, of unemployment, and what work entails. The Prince's Youth Business Trust fulfils that role.

One other significant problem of the 1980s and 1990s is that, with more and more global competition and greater demands on British business to be more efficient and effective in its operations, larger companies are growing in size—not by increasing their staff numbers, but by reducing them to become more efficient. Consequently, the growth of companies today often occurs in the capital of the business and not necessarily in staff.

That is not always bad for Britain. Indeed, it is often good for Britain, because it means that our best companies are internationally efficient and competitive. It also means, however, that more and more young people will not necessarily get work in large companies, they will get work in smaller businesses and even start their own small business. Self-employment, which is some 3 million strong in this country, now offers hope of a good future in employment for many young people.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has given way on that very point. Coming from an area where the bulk of people are employed in small businesses, I support him. I pay my own tribute to the Prince's Youth Business Trust, for one of my constituents was one of the national winners this year. I pay tribute to its work in stimulating young people to go forward, when other aids are no longer able to help them.

Mr. Shaw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point so well. I know that many hon. Members will be able to say the same sort of thing about the way in which their constituents have won awards. That is a feature of the scheme that encourages more young people to come on, creating the friendly competitive atmosphere in which the businesses develop.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I am listening with great interest to my hon. Friend's important speech on such an important and interesting subject, but will he emphasise the after-care by the Prince's Trust once a business is established, and its unwillingness to prepare a business plan for a young person, so that nobody gets the wrong idea? I believe that that is the point.

Mr. Shaw: As always, my hon. Friend is slightly ahead of the game, and he has raised the very point that I intended to stress. However, it is worth emphasising at every stage in my speech that the after-care and advisory work is a most important feature of the way in which the Prince's Youth Business Trust operates.

I admire tremendously the work of the trust in helping young people to set up their own businesses. The skills that need to be developed to start a business are substantial. Young people also have to face the risks that that involves. Starting a business is not risk-free, and the trust emphasises the risks involved before allowing a young person to proceed with his or her scheme. The entrepreneurial spirit of the country and of those young people who take part is greatly encouraged. The young people also need hard work and dedication, or they will not succeed. At every stage, the trust encourages those qualities to develop.

[Mr. Shaw]

When one goes round the exhibitions and sees many of the young people involved in the trust, one realises that, in a different environment and without the opportunities provided by the trust, those people might not have been able to develop those abilities. I am convinced that some of them have developed a hard-working and dedicated attitude and an entrepreneurial spirit that they did not realise were there within them, which have been released by the work of the trust.

The Prince's Youth Business Trust helps 18 to 29-year-olds who are out of work and disadvantaged—people who, for one of a number of reasons, are finding life tough. Some are living in deprived areas, and in areas where the Government or the European Union provide support in one way or another. Many lack formal education at advanced level, some live in bad housing conditions, some come from single-parent families, many have unemployed parents, and others have no family support. The trust makes a special effort to encourage applications from disabled people, from members of ethnic minority communities and from former offenders. The age limit for disabled applicants is 30.

Young people who are to join the trust scheme must all have a viable idea for starting their own business. That is the key—a viable idea. They then have to prepare an acceptable and well worked-through business plan, and must prove that they have the necessary initiative and commitment to make a go of it. As a general rule, they cannot obtain money from other sources, because money is often not available to people in their circumstances—and that is where the trust fills a gap in the financing market.

I shall now go into a little detail for the House, and place on record some of the methods by which the trust operates. First, it operates on sound business principles. There is a tremendous emphasis on sound business practice, and that is a critical aspect of the approach of the trust and its advisers to helping young people.

The trust gives loans of up to about £5,000—although the average loan is as low as £2,000—to people who are setting up or expanding a business, and the money may be used for stock, equipment or working capital. The loans are repayable; money is not written off. For the business, repayment is as follows: for the first six months neither interest nor capital is repaid; in the second six months, there are capital repayments but no interest; in the second year, capital is repaid and interest is charged at 3 per cent; in the third year, full capital and interest at 8 per cent. are paid.

Although most applicants receive loans, the trust sometimes offers grants of up to £1,500 to individuals and up to £3,000 to groups of people who want to start a business. Grants may be used for tools, equipment, transport, fees, insurance or training, but not as working capital or for rent, rates, raw materials or stock.

Since 1991, the trust has been able to give second loans of not more than £5,000 to people under 30 who have already had one loan or grant. Second loans are purely for expansion; they cannot be used to rescue failing operations, for which different help and advice are available.

The fact that second-loan finance is available is an important factor worth bearing in mind, because in my experience of small businesses, all too often those that can fail are the successful ones, because they get carried away with their own success, extend their debtors and end up in serious financial difficulties. All too often in this country, it is the business that has done reasonably well as a start-up business that over-extends itself and may get into serious difficulties, so it is especially interesting that the trust has now recognised the problem, and can now give second-tier finance for expanding businesses.

Another key feature is the fact that test marketing grants are often given to young people who have a good idea but need to do more market research before the idea can be put into practice, or even before it can be determined whether it is viable. Such market research often results in the trust's giving further support for more work even before the business starts.

Much pre-planning is involved, which is especially good and helpful for young people. Careful planning is an essential ingredient. No loan is given without a business plan, which is checked by the trust's pool of experienced business men and women. Market research is encouraged, required, and tested, if possible.

By now, the House will appreciate that the trust needs both staff and finance to do its work. Its operations now extend to the whole of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and north of the border there is a separate Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust. The trust's work is carried on through 38 area boards, to which young people apply for financial support. I hope that many hon. Members are either in contact with or have spoken to their area boards—I am sure that that is true of most Members who are here today.

Most area managers are either seconded or are trust employees whose costs are funded in whole or in part by donations. Local business people, too, are involved in each area board, and there is at least one area manager and sometimes more than one. Invaluable support, either voluntary or donated, comes from companies, training and enterprise councils, local authorities, Government Departments and European funds. I am pleased to say that there is even an area office in my constituency, at Whitfield just outside Dover.

If I may be forgiven for doing so, I shall refer briefly to the problems in my area and to the relevance of the trust in my constituency and in east Kent as a whole.

The area that I represent is suffering from a serious change because of the channel tunnel. Obviously, the ferry industry has become more efficient and effective, but it is expecting considerable competition. There has been a change in the labour market. The larger companies in the area have been shedding labour, and in many cases, for reasons that I have already explained, they have passed their peak in their use of labour.

Many young people who had expected to follow careers similar to those of their parents will not be able to do so. People have been slow to realise that small businesses might fill that gap. That is not surprising, as much of the area has not been used to running small businesses in the past. Therefore, there is an opportunity for something like the Prince's Youth Business Trust to help develop the skills of young people.

Some young people in east Kent have developed skills and taken up loans and grants from the trust, and I pay tribute both to the trust and to those young people for showing entrepreneurial and risk-taking skills.

I hosted an exhibition for the trust in the House of Commons some four years ago, and it is with slight sadness that I report that one of the businesses at that exhibition which was founded by someone from my constituency is no longer working and employing in my constituency. The business became so successful that it moved closer to its market in London, and it has set up a successful operation in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner).

My hon. Friend is not here today, but she sends her apologies as she is away on House of Commons business in Europe. The trust has been successful in helping young people in my area, and I look forward to more help in the future for the young people who need the benefits which the trust can bring.

The success rate of the trust in helping businesses is considerable. An independent survey of the trust carried out recently on behalf of the Department of Employment showed that two thirds of businesses were still trading after two to three years. That is an incredible achievement, because it is the reverse of what normally happens.

Normally, two thirds of businesses fail within two to three years of their start-up date. It is quite an achievement for many of the young people who have taken advantage of the trust that their businesses have a greater likelihood of success than the national average for small businesses. Starting a business is risky, and it is good to see that level of success.

The trust's strong performance is particularly interesting when one takes into account the age and background of those it has helped. Many of the young people would not normally have been associated with running a successful business, nor would their background have been the sort from which one would have expected success in business to come. The trust has managed to generate within the United Kingdom the skill and ability which, while clearly present, might not have had an opportunity to grow if the trust had not been in existence.

It is not all bad news for those businesses which are no longer trading. Half the people involved in such businesses decided that self-employment was not for them and are now working for other people. The skills and the discipline which those people learned from their work were useful for them in getting work elsewhere.

I am not one for political correctness but, with a lady Minister on the Front Bench, I should refer to International Women's Day. My wife has taken International Women's Day literally, and she is in America on business at the moment. She is celebrating that day by battling for her bit of business, which I hope will bring benefits to Britain as a result.

One interesting feature to mention on International Women's Day is that the trust has discovered that the women it helps into business have been shown to have a slightly better rate of survival in business than men. Women in businesses helped by the trust seem to be more able to face competition than is often imagined. That shows that what helps women is not so much giving them positive discrimination as making sure that the opportunity is there for them.

The report sponsored by the Department of Employment also shows that the trust is cost-effective and very efficient in terms of the way in which helps businesses and helps people to avoid becoming unemployed and claiming benefit.

Businesses do not survive without a solid form of successful experience, which the trust ensures they have. The trust helps young people whether they remain in business or go to work for somebody else's business.

Many people may well ask why the trust's success rate is so good. What is it that especially helps the young people to develop their businesses? What is the trust doing for women in business that they perhaps might not get elsewhere? What is it that helps young people to develop their skills and to take on the risks involved in starting a business?

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) referred to the careful preparations which a young person must make, and to the advice that is available. That is the key to the whole system. A business plan must be prepared in a disciplined manner. Market research must be carried out carefully by a young person into whether his business will be able to sell its products or services. But the one magic and essential ingredient which we have mentioned is the advisers, and it is worth paying tribute to the advisers who help the trust.

The advisers are business men themselves, and they give ongoing help and advice to every trust-supported business. Each person who starts up a business has his own adviser. That adviser is a volunteer who ideally has started his own business, and he will keep a friendly eye on the entrepreneur for a couple years or more. The adviser can call in other expert help if it is necessary. If an adviser does not have the skills which are relevant to a problem, another adviser can be called on.

The trust has about 5,400 advisers, but the current rate of expansion of the businesses which the trust is helping is such that about 2,000 new volunteers are needed every year. One of the big problems is that marketing experts are greatly in demand and, having a father who has been involved in marketing, I am not surprised. One of the UK's weaknesses has been that we have not done enough marketing in the past, and I am delighted that the trust puts an emphasis on encouraging young people to take marketing advice and tries to provide marketing advisers.

The trust is more than just a business trust. It has become the largest business consultancy in the world, but it pays its consultants absolutely nothing. It has been estimated that the trust gives £5 million of advice free every year to the supported businesses and to the people who created the businesses.

I shall briefly mention some examples of the types of businesses created under the trust. I have visited a number of the regular exhibitions at St James's palace, which the Prince has hosted, at which I have seen a wide variety of businesses. There are often 25 businesses run by young people represented at a typical exhibition, and they cover a wide range of products and services. One common factor which one cannot fail to notice is the tremendous enthusiasm of the young people for businesses which they have created.

The businesses range from fashion concerns to swing-boat operations in fairgrounds, and from those involved in the world of electronics to those who make hand-made pottery. There are a whole host of mobile businesses, including farriers and hairdressers. There have been drystone wall builders and repair firms. There have been businesses dealing with golf clubs, musical instruments, ceramics and gilding. One firm even offers alternative wedding arrangements. There are cake makers and pet food delivery services.

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[Mr. Shaw]

The trust proudly claims that it has some unusual businesses, although one wonders what an unusual business is today, which include charcoal burners, sheep pregnancy testing and a firm that tracks underground pipes and cables. There are falconers, a team of high-wire motorcycling experts, and fire-eating jousters. The trust has also supported businesses that teach chess or rock guitar.

The 20,000th young person supported by the Prince's Youth Business Trust was a lady from Sheffield who set up a shiatsu practice. I am looking forward to someone explaining all the details of shiatsu to me. The trust is looking forward to celebrating the 25,000th young recipient of its work, and is well on the way to the 30,000th during the next year or so.

A young man who uses a wheelchair could not find a lightweight and inexpensive model, so he designed his own and started a business. He now has a turnover of £200,000 from selling lightweight, inexpensive wheelchairs.

The businesses have also reached great heights of success and the PYBT has created some millionaires. The first is a Kenyan-born Asian, who is running a garage in Peterborough. His recent turnover approached £750,000 and he has been appointed a member of his area Prince's Youth Business Trust board. His case interests me in particular, because it shows that the trust now has people coming on to its advisory board who have gone through the process and been helped themselves, which means that success is starting to build success. That is one of the key features of getting successful businesses going—one needs the advice and contact with someone who has done it before.

There are numerous award schemes, as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said in an intervention, which often have prizes and other methods of encouraging young people to develop businesses. They operate in a friendly and competitive way, which encourages young people to build something really worthwhile and to achieve recognition as a result of the award.

The *Reader's Digest* recently sponsored the award scheme. One of the more successful businesses is Caring Force, which is run by two ladies in Merseyside, provides a professional mobile care assistant service to the community and employs 35 people. Another award winner is a young man in Lancashire who has developed a universal hand control for disabled drivers. Another is a Nottingham metal-cutting business called Esprit Automation, which has just exported 22 cutting machines to the far east. They are very worthy of an award and of the recognition of hon. Members.

One company peels and packs vegetables for restaurants and hotels. Another person runs a surfing business in Cornwall, and another uses recycled materials to make jewellery and bags and employs 33 people. So there are environmentally friendly businesses, too.

Various businesses and inventions have been well marketed and given considerable support. Apparently, one even sells a particularly ingenious type of cuff link known as Cuffas, and another makes solid fuel briquettes from wood shavings—obviously another environmentally friendly business.

The markets of the various businesses cover the social spectrum. I gather that one makes hats for society weddings and its hats, and accessories have featured in *Vogue* and *Harpers & Queen* magazines. The goods sold by PYBT businesses are on sale around the world and its events department is hard at work organising many exhibitions to promote the products and services. One young engineer—it is nice to hear that manufacturing businesses are being helped as well—has developed a gear invention that is helping to break national and international speed records, although I hope not on our motorways.

The trust has been involved in a successful pilot scheme to help young offenders in custody to prepare and set up businesses when they are released. The first young offenders involved in the scheme are in business—one as a welder and one as a dog groomer—and two ladies who met in prison are running a greetings card business.

The House will by now realise that both conventional and non-conventional businesses are supported. It is also worth noting that minority businesses, people from ethnic minority groups and disabled persons are also given full support. Leaflets for young people wanting to set up businesses have been printed in Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi and Gujerati. Considerable emphasis is placed on trying to ensure full equality of opportunity under the PYBT scheme.

About 340 disabled people have been helped to start up in business, which is a substantial percentage compared with those in the economy as a whole. Clearly, that is something that needs support. They have set up a wide variety of businesses and range from landscape gardeners, photographers, remedial therapists, clowns and disability awareness trainers to jewellery designers.

About 95 full and part-time members of staff are paid by the trust. We should pay tribute to their hard work and skills and the effort that they have put in. There are also 49 secondees and 89 funded employees from Government, industry and many large companies. In many instances, the latter have taken a break from their career to support something that they, and the boards of directors of those companies, believe is worth while.

The trust needs to attract at least 40 new secondees a year. I hope that anyone listening to this debate or reading *Hansard* who is interested will apply to help the trust in its work. It operates under a 95-member advisory council—there is plenty of advice and support.

The PYBT obtains grants and assistance. The Government have given considerable support and the Prince of Wales set up an appeal for about £28 million on his 40th birthday in 1988, which the Government, with all-party support, agreed to match pound for pound. The appeal has depended on donations from the private sector and, despite the problems of the recession, there has been considerable support from that sector because it recognises that the work is worth while.

I understand that the Department of Employment has given about £21 million to the PYBT, which is extremely cost-effective because the Department is paying about £2,500 per person helped. That money is forthcoming only if the young entrepreneur is still trading 15 months after being given the original PYBT loan or grant. A second condition is that the trust must raise funds from other sources. The demands put on the trust by the

Employment Department are therefore reasonable and effective, and encourage success. They also encourage the trust to demonstrate that it is succeeding.

There are many people to be helped out there, and, as limits on resources enable the trust to help only about 5,000 a year, there is probably a need for additional finance, but I stress to my hon. Friend the Minister that the purpose of my debate was not to press for more funds. We did not feel that that was appropriate today, although I am sure that my hon. Friend will have inferred from what I have said that I would certainly not be unhappy if the Ministry delivered more funds or resources in this instance. As a chartered accountant and member of the Conservative finance committee, I do not like to see money wasted in the public sector.

Without making a strong demand for more funds from the Government, one can say that considerable evidence shows that the trust is an effective way of helping young people. It is effective in terms of both cost and quality of output.

By emphasising the value for money that the trust is producing, the large number of young people who are helped, the many benefits to members in a wide variety of constituencies, and the future opportunities for young people, I hope that I have given the House a flavour of the real benefits which the scheme brings to the country. Many young people will be better off as a result of the trust, and many other people will benefit as a result of the solid business base that is being developed from work that it carries out.

10.40 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate and pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) for raising this subject. My researcher tells me that we have never had a debate on the Prince's Youth Business Trust and that it has been mentioned only once in a written question. That is odd and sad, but I hope that we shall correct it today.

May I say at the outset that hon. Members are united by the fact that your immediate predecessor, Madam Speaker, since stepping down from his job as Speaker of this House, has become involved in the trust. The House, and especially hon. Members in the Chamber today, therefore can all feel associated with the initiative.

The hon. Member for Dover raised this topic not to ask for something but to tell the House how extremely good the scheme is. I want to share that main message with him, although at the end of my brief speech I shall express my real concern about the trust's ability to do as it wants in south London, given the circumstances in that area.

I am glad to have an opportunity to speak for two reasons: first, because in my parliamentary party's team I am responsible for looking after the interests of young people, urban and looking after urban issues; and, secondly, because my constituency has one of the highest unemployment rates in the United Kingdom.

It is no pleasure to have a constituency with the fourth highest rate of unemployment in Great Britain and the fifth highest in the UK—west Belfast has a higher unemployment rate—with 7,500 people unemployed. According to the latest figures, male unemployment is 28.5 per cent.; female unemployment is 12.8 per cent.; and the average rate is 28.1 per cent.

So anyone who gives unemployed people, particularly the young, an opportunity to be employed, engaged, resourceful and independent is extremely welcome and hugely necessary. About 1 million young people in the age group which we are discussing are currently registered unemployed, so the potential for helping people who need such initiatives is huge.

The hon. Member for Dover gave some figures, and I shall try not to repeat much of what he said. But the figures he gave are extraordinary: the trust has helped some 23,000 people in 18,000 newly formed businesses, two thirds of which are still trading. Compared with the normal fall-out rate among small businesses, that figure is exceptional, if not unique.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the fact that the money is given in loans or grants, and that advice is given free of charge by experienced business people—advice is given at the beginning and advisers remain available to the young people—appears to make the trust the biggest business consultancy of its type in the world. The fact that the aid and assistance is free is extraordinary.

I am sure that the trust would not mind if the debate served to tell a few people out there who might be interested in being advisors to come and join it, so I am happy to plug for more advisers: please contact the main office. In a second, I shall be as crude about telling people how to contact the trust, because we are here to promote a good thing.

I am much more "wised up" on the trust than I was a year ago, not because I was not aware of the trust before, but because the trust has recently made a particular effort to communicate to hon. Members. Initiatives have been made here and in another place.

I was among hon. Members from both sides of the House invited to Buckingham Palace in December by the Prince of Wales to be briefed on his trusts' work. That briefing helped to explain the complication that there is a family of prince's trusts, of which the youth business trust is only one. It is important to clarify that point. The trust that we are discussing, which is for business start-up, covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a similar trust exists for Scotland.

I pay tribute to the fact that the Prince of Wales has taken initiatives to set up organisations that reach out to and work with those in the community for whom extra help, support, advice and finance can make all the difference. May I list the whole family of prince's trusts so that it is clearly on the record? It comprises the Prince's Trust and Royal Jubilee Trusts; the Prince of Wales's Advisory Group on Disability; the Prince's Trust Volunteers; the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust, which is the sister organisation to the Prince's Youth Business Trust; the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum; Business in the Community; Scottish Business in the Community and the Prince of Wales's Committee.

I shall now make a crude plug for the Prince's Youth Business Trust. People can express their interest to area boards, but the trust's address is 5, Cleveland place, London SW1. The telephone and minicom number is 0171 925 2900, and the fax number is 071 839 6494. Cleveland place is at the back of St. James's square. If anyone thinks that that is a posh address, as it is, the area board addresses are often much less posh. In any case, people have only to telephone.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Another interesting statistic is that the third of businesses which are not still trading have not necessarily failed. Half of those involved in them have decided to opt for self-employment, and the trust has therefore acted as a stepping stone. Another good aspect is that the trust operates as a last resort. That may not happen in every case, as it is not perfect, but it seeks to help when people have been turned down by banks and cannot get going with help from elsewhere.

It is a bit like going to the European Court, in that one must exhaust the domestic remedies first. People must have exhausted their normal financial possibilities first. The trust also sets the precondition that beneficiaries are not from well-off backgrounds, and that resources, buildings and training schemes would not normally be available to potential beneficiaries.

The figures relating to beneficiaries are telling. A pie chart in the last report shows that 9 per cent. of those helped were young offenders; 10 per cent. were from ethnic minority backgrounds; and 5 per cent. were young disabled people. Those are all above-average percentages.

The chart also shows that 41 per cent. of those helped were female. Although not half, that figure is good, given how often such schemes are skewed in favour of males. Moreover, no area of the country gets much less than 5 per cent. of the money—Northern Ireland gets 4.8 per cent. The area that received most was the north-west, so funds are not metropolis-centred either.

Interestingly, in passing, we are talking about what the hon. Member for Dover rightly says is the main area of business in our society. I gather that 90 per cent. of businesses in our country—as the Minister must know better than I—employ fewer than 10 people, and 70 per cent. employ fewer than five people. Small businesses are what Britain is about. For whatever reason, the age of coal mines and docks is past.

It is good that we produce vibrant earners and vibrant survivors. It is important to ensure that young men and women—I pay particular tribute to the latter on International Women's Day—have the skills to be part of the work force, to earn for themselves and to earn for Britain.

The Government have been helpful. They have, I think, said that they are paying £2,500 a person, up to a total of £10 million, for three years, starting this year, but only if the person continues to trade after 15 months, and there must be matching funds. I hope that that will be sustained and never reduced. As the hon. Member for Dover said, more money would be welcome.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Dover mentioned that another good deal was recently secured with the clearing banks—the "Banks Directory". They will match other funds for the best businesses, on preferential interest rates. That means that those businesses may be moved to the support of the banks, releasing Prince's Youth Business trust moneys to work with other people. That is very good news.

I have witnessed the work on the ground, as others have. I visited, like Jeremy White, chief executive of the trust, the firm that features pictorially in the most recent annual report. That firm is imaginatively called Michenuels, named after the three lads who are the partners—Miguel, Henroy and Michael, whom we met. They are furniture makers and restorers. They had done some work; they were unemployed; they had come together and were now restoring furniture.

They were in a little estate business start-up unit on the borders of my constituency, on the Deptford-Bermondsey border. They seek more premises. They want to obtain premises on the main road, so that they can sell their wares. They are enthusiastic, vibrant, go-ahead and ready to storm the world. If anyone has any furniture that they need restoring, they should go to Michenuels, because they will do a good job. That is exactly the type of business that we should be interested in.

I shall now mention local circumstances and make my specific request to the Minister. In south London, 40 per cent. of new businesses are started by members of the ethnic minority community, and I am told that 33 new businesses have been set up in or near my constituency by the Prince's Youth Business trust. I am told that south London will receive £62,000 from the trust this year in grants and £250,000 in loans. Good money is entering an area with one of the highest unemployment rates in Britain.

Madam Speaker, you know as well as anyone that one should never write off a district simply because it has traditionally suffered from high unemployment. People living in such districts are not less skilled or less talented. By contrast, one probably needs to be more streetwise, bright, sharp-eyed and bushy-tailed if one lives in a grotty estate in the middle of south London, or Liverpool, Leeds or Bradford, than if one lives on the white cliffs of Dover, looking out over lovely views. If the success rate in south London is that more than 80 per cent. of PYBT businesses continue to trade after three months, and more than 60 per cent. are still going after three years, that is good news indeed.

The Prince's Youth Business trust relies heavily on business start-up schemes, and business start-up courses run by the local enterprise agencies are the precondition to that working. Young people, when they are in the scheme, also need the enterprise allowance money—that is the way in which they fund themselves, so that they are supported for what is now six months and was 12 months.

There is a significant worry that enterprise allowance might be removed—I flag that up. If it is, it will pull the rug from under the scheme altogether. I say to the Minister: please may we have a guarantee today, or will she speak to her colleagues and give a guarantee later, that, as long as the present Government are in office, the enterprise allowance will not be removed?

The immediate additional problem is that, since the South Thames training and enterprise council went into liquidation at the end of December 1994, no one can claim enterprise allowance in the South Thames TEC area, and there are no business start-up courses. Suddenly, because the TEC was the servicing agency, there is a closed door. There is no way in, and that is unacceptable. It is unacceptable that the Prince's Youth Business trust, the door to opportunity for many people, is closed as a result of the way in which Government and the TEC have been sorting out their business.

I initiated, and we have had, an Adjournment debate, thanks to you, Madam Speaker, about the South Thames TEC, but that matter must be sorted out soon. The people knocking at the PYBT door in south London are now not receiving an answer, because the TEC is not there.

My last general request to the Minister is, will she please not only sort that out so that we may get into the slipstream again, but also put money back into TECs? Cutting TEC funding—£137 million was cut last year—is bad news, because it reduces enterprise allowance and reduces business start-up schemes. I repeat my specific request to the Minister; will she please not leave south London as the one area of the country that, because our TEC has folded, is unable to benefit?

I end with a quote from the boss, which he wrote in the forward to this year's annual report. The Prince of Wales said:

"Helping just one person to start their own business, thus taking them off unemployment benefit, saves the country thousands of pounds each year. But the benefits of our work go far beyond the merely financial. As I often see, starting a business not only restores the self-confidence of the individual, but can also play a part in helping to shore up the fabric of the community in which they live and work."

I hope that we can all say amen to that.

I say to the hon. Member for Dover, the debate is welcome. I hope that the whole country gets the message, and that many more young people hear about the scheme as a result of his initiative and, Madam Speaker, your choice today.

10.55 am

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): It is a pleasure to be able to contribute to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on securing a debate on such an important and interesting subject.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dover takes a keen interest in small businesses, and especially venture capital activities. As has been mentioned, he will be well aware that few venture capital businesses in the traditional sense can boast a success rate approaching that of the Prince's Youth Business trust. Of course, traditional venture capitalists charge enormously high rates of return on their investments, and the charity that we are talking about does it for nothing. There is a tremendous lesson to be learned from that alone.

We have in the Prince's Youth Business trust an excellent example of what can be done to stimulate economic activity, to create jobs and to give people a sense of purpose. I know that all Members who will contribute to the debate will echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Dover said.

It is not simply an economic benefit, although the economic benefit is important, that the trust helps to achieve. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover has said—this was echoed by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—that small businesses are the backbone of economic activity in the country. Anything we can do to stimulate the creation and development of smaller businesses must be good news for the economy and for jobs.

We have a lower rate of unemployment for people between the ages of 18 and 25 in this country than is the case in many other countries in the European Community, but at 14 per cent. it is still too high. I have no doubt that one of the reasons why we have a lower rate than, for example, Spain, where the rate is 38 per cent., is the existence of schemes such as the one that we are discussing—imaginative schemes, designed to tackle the problem specifically and creatively.

This excellent trust does a huge amount of work to bring hope and purpose and to offer opportunity to those whose talents would frequently otherwise be wasted. I notice also that it is an efficient organisation, and that the Department for Employment last year gave the trust the accolade of saying that it was the most cost-effective job creation programme in the country. The trust can be proud of that.

The trust is also an excellent example of partnership in action. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover mentioned the various agencies—the local authorities, the training and enterprise councils, Government Departments of course, and the the European Union—which co-operate with the private sector to make it all happen. Obviously, central Government funding has been vital and welcome. I think I am right in saying that £20 million of central Government funding has been applied to the trust since its inception, and, as we know, a new arrangement has been put in place for the next three years, which will add another £10 million to what has been spent.

The success of the scheme depends crucially on the commitment of people and companies in the private sector, who are prepared to lend their time and expertise and give willingly to help young people to set up in business. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover pointed out that it is estimated that that assistance alone is worth about £5 million per year.

Three years ago, Robert Darrell started a business under the scheme with a £5,000 loan. His business now turns over £2.4 million per year and he believes:

"The advisers provided by the Trust are as valuable as the loan".

I think that that is absolutely correct.

The scheme has caught the imagination of businesses in Surrey to such an extent that the clarion call by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey to the private sector to become involved in the scheme is somewhat otiose. Until recently, a superfluity of business people wished to offer their help for free, but unfortunately their number was not matched by people wishing to participate in the scheme.

The hon. Gentleman, who spoke eloquently about the problems in his constituency, smiles wryly. It is true that, thankfully, Surrey does not suffer the same sorts of problems as his constituency. However, that is not to say that individuals do not need help. I hope that they will come forward and take advantage of the scheme.

It is in keeping with the spirit of the trust that, faced with the situation that I have described in Surrey, instead of sitting around and doing nothing, advisers have gone into the community to encourage people to come forward with ideas for developing their businesses. To that end, a roadshow will be held in Caterham in my constituency this Friday. I look forward to attending it, and I hope that it is enormously successful.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If there are spare advisers in Surrey, they could travel to areas where there are not enough advisers to talk to the people there. They will be more than welcome in south London.

Mr. Ainsworth: I will certainly convey the hon. Gentleman's message to the advisers in Surrey. Bermondsey is not that far away, and I hope that something will come of his suggestion.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

Every hon. Member has his or her favourite scheme, and a few from the Surrey area have caught my imagination. One involves a young man with cerebral palsy, who, with the help of the trust, has established a business duplicating musical cassettes. I am assured that that is not a breach of copyright, and that it is perfectly legal. That business is extremely successful, and it has given that young man access to a whole new field of activity, which would otherwise have remained closed to him.

Perhaps a more spectacular example is that of the young man from Kingston who, four years ago, visited his mother in hospital. He found that, like many people who are in hospital for any length of time, she was becoming very bored, and he brought a television to the hospital for her to use. That gave him an idea, and, with the help of the trust, he set up a company called Hospital Entertainment, which rents televisions to hospitals. The company has done extremely well, and it now turns over £750,000 per year. It recently acquired a subsidiary of Thorn EMI, which specialises in similar activities.

Less well known is the growing success of the trust abroad. Through Youth Enterprise Service International, the Prince's Youth Business Trust is exporting its expertise and its ideas to several countries, notably India and Hungary. I am happy to say that that enterprise is backed by the Foreign Office with money from the Overseas Development Administration programme.

The trust's activities are not only good news economically and socially—they fulfil an important social function which was perhaps the original idea behind the trust—but also an example of a great British idea which is being applied successfully overseas. I think that we should all be proud of that.

It is hard to think of a better idea. The trust is not the biggest charity in Britain, but it is targeted very carefully. It is difficult to think of any charity—particularly one associated with the unemployed—which has such a rewarding and beneficial effect on those who become involved with it. The trust's advantages are summed up by a member of the Surrey Prince's Youth Business Trust board, who said:

"The Trust does so much to get young people doing things for themselves; and even if their businesses just potter along and they don't do much with them and eventually move on, they have so much more to offer prospective employers as a result of their experience".

The beneficiaries of the trust, the people they employ subsequently and every hon. Member have cause to be grateful to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales for having the idea in the first place, and to all those who give of their time, energy and effort to ensure that the scheme is a success. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dover for giving the House the opportunity to put on record its appreciation for the tremendous work of the Prince's Youth Business Trust. I wish the trust every success in the future.

11.5 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on his success in the ballot, and on introducing this morning's debate on the Prince's Youth Business Trust. I think that everyone agrees that the trust has done very valuable work over the years in helping young unemployed people into self-employment. Most of the people the trust supports are in their twenties and have been unemployed for a considerable time.

The hon. Member for Dover referred to a survey conducted by the Department of Employment to gauge the trust's success rate. It found that more than two thirds of businesses created under the scheme are still operating three years later. That is a better success rate than that of most of the high street banks, which in most cases turned down those ideas in the first place. It makes one wonder about the ability of those who are running our banking system to gauge individuals' potential to contribute to economic growth.

Some 3,000 young people have benefited from the scheme in the last 12 months. As it is International Women's Day, I point out that 40 per cent. of that number were women, and I am pleased to say that that includes some of my constituents. About 24,000 people have taken advantage of the trust since its inception. That figure relates roughly to the number of long-term young unemployed people in Yorkshire, Humberside and the east Midlands. That gives us some idea of how much assistance the trust has provided.

The average cost to the Prince's Youth Business Trust of creating a job is £2,500, which is less than a third of the cost of keeping one unemployed person for a year. Clearly, in that context the trust is a major success. That cost pales into insignificance when compared with the cost of inward investment through regional selective assistance, and it shows how the country has benefited from that type of scheme.

I visited the Prince's Youth Business Trust exhibition marquee at the Rotherham show last year as a guest of the South Yorkshire region, and I was greatly impressed by the types of products on display.

I spoke to a man named Frank White, who started a business called Busy Bees in May 1991 after having been unemployed for 10 years. The business, which is run from the Westfield road craft park in Rotherham, makes garden ornaments. What I found most amazing about the company is that between 60 and 80 per cent. of its output, depending on the season, is exported to the United States of America.

Mr. White exports garden ornaments in the guise of alligators to America. They are constructed in three sections and are most impressive, although I would not want to have one in my garden. Mr. White is a success not only for himself, but also for the country and the local economy, because he employs two people in his business.

Since its inception in South Yorkshire, more than 700 people have benefited from the trust's work. In 1994, the trust helped 16 young people to start up 13 businesses in my constituency. Those businesses range from a mobile beauty therapist to tachograph services, and from a manufacturer of jewellery to a delicatessen in the village of Thurcroft. In the latter two cases, the individuals concerned had been out of work for 18 months, so that shows how successful the trust has been in combatting long-term youth unemployment in the area.

I welcome the fact that the Department of Employment now matches the donations that the trust receives from private sources. It is my understanding that, if private funding is raised, the money from the Government now represents about 20 per cent. of the trust's total funding.

Echoing what has been said by all hon. Members this morning, I very much hope that the Government's commitment will continue after the current end date of 1996.

I should also mention that the Government are a taker as well as a giver, for they have removed an important method of potential support for participants in the Prince's Youth Business Trust in recent months. I refer to the business start-up allowance that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. That problem has not arisen in his constituency, simply because the South London TEC has gone into liquidation. The Government have moved money away from supporting self-employment for the previously unemployed by that method.

When the business start-up allowance replaced the enterprise allowance scheme, a large number of unemployed people were dropped from the system, despite the fact that the "£1,000 of own capital" rule was removed.

In 1984, more than a quarter of those receiving the enterprise allowance had been out of work for a year or more and all were unemployed. By the first year of business start-up, just one in 10 of those receiving the allowance had been long-term unemployed, and a quarter of the people on the scheme were not classified as unemployed.

The withdrawal of the business start-up scheme as a nationally available measure is a distinct threat to the ability of the Prince's Youth Business Trust to perform effectively. That is not an idle remark. In South Yorkshire, for example, the effects of losing the business start-up allowance are already being felt.

In the past, applicants had been able to claim a business start-up allowance of £35 a week for the first year of trading. The South Yorkshire area manager, Mr. David Houghton, wrote to me recently:

"We have been informed by the TECs in south Yorkshire that"

the allowance

"is now being withdrawn this month and not being replaced. Our information is that enterprise allowance is disappearing nationally except for a couple of areas in the North East.".

He continued:

"In my view I believe that the removal of the . . . allowance will dramatically affect the number of people we help and we are already seeing signs of this in South Yorkshire. Throughout the last year the South Yorkshire Board have considered between 12 and 16 businesses each month, but in February 1995 only eight businesses were helped and this month possibly only five or six are being put forward.".

The impact of the Government's ending of the start-up allowance is giving some early warning signs to the South Yorkshire manager of the Prince's Youth Business Trust. If that is a reflection of the future, we shall have to reconsider the position.

A great percentage of the people the trust helps have been unemployed for six months or more, and have no collateral, so the guaranteed business start-up allowance of £35 a week was vital to them. It made the difference between taking the risk of trying to improve their standard of living and continuing to live on state benefits.

I know that there is common agreement about state benefits. Certainly, people with young children find it difficult to get into any work, let alone self-employment. The experience of the Prince's Youth Business Trust is that, in the first few months of trading, the businesses rely on the £35 a week while they build up sales and a customer base.

My local area manager continued in his letter:

"If these unemployed young people lose their initiative due to the curtailment of the allowance they will miss the opportunity the Trust gives them at a relatively low cost to become self-employed and will possibly remain unemployed at a yearly cost of thousands of pounds to the state.".

That cannot be right. The Government must put in place some alternative business encouragement measures to replace what we are about to lose or are losing.

The bottom line is that there is there is no real money on the table to encourage young unemployed people to start their own businesses. There is plenty of advice and training, but no hard cash. The cushion provided by the business start-up allowance has gone and the allowance itself has been subsumed into the general funds of the single regeneration budget.

My own borough, Rotherham, was successful in its bid for the single regeneration budget. I was looking at the submission and the outcome only yesterday. However, the only thing on offer under the single regeneration budget in Rotherham is advice to people who are already getting that advice through the Prince's Youth Business Trust. Under the circumstances, it seems that the allowance is being withdrawn without being replaced.

We have to ensure that such a cavalier attitude does not damage the operation of the Prince's Youth Business Trust. It is vital for the growth of local economies, and I hope that the Government will look hard at the possible consequences of the withdrawal of the business start-up allowance.

My own borough has only half the national average for self-employed people—the figure is only 4 per cent. I am clear in my mind that there is a great deal of scope for the growth of self-employment as a means of getting rid of long-term unemployed in my constituency, but it will not happen if people cannot get the assistance they have had in the past.

In the next few weeks, I hope that the Government will look hard at the results from the Prince's Youth Business Trust about how many start-ups are occurring, and if the withdrawal of business start-up allowance from long-term unemployed people has created a problem for the trust, I hope that the Government take measures to remedy it. Like everybody else, I am sure that they would like the trust to go from strength to strength in its work for our young people in the economy.

11.17 am

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on obtaining the debate, and on raising the important matters that we have been discussing. He was quite right to draw attention to his own track record of support for small businesses which is well recognised in the House, and on which he also deserves to be congratulated.

I was interested to hear from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that today is an unique occasion, and that we have not discussed the Prince's Youth Business Trust before. I hope that we will not leave it quite so long in future before we return to such an important subject.

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

I think that the interest caused by the business trust was exemplified by the number of hon. Members who have been present in the Chamber during the debate. I mention in particular the hon. Member for Belfast South (Rev. Martin Smyth), my hon. Friends the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), and the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon). I now see my hon. Friends the Members for Finchley (Mr. Booth) and for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). It is a tribute to the Prince's Youth Business Trust that so many hon. Members are present this morning to hear about its excellent work and to pay their own tributes to it.

Certainly, the PYBT carries out excellent work in helping disadvantaged young people to enter self-employment and set up their own businesses. Today's debate provides us all with a welcome opportunity to publicise that work.

The trust was founded in 1986. Since then, it has helped some 25,000 young people to set up or expand more than 19,000 businesses. It does that, as we have heard during the debate, through providing grants or loans and in particular through its volunteer network of business advisers. Those advisers are assigned to particular young people and act as mentors, giving help or advice for a couple of years or so.

I find it very heartening that there are currently some 4,500 volunteers, most of whom have themselves started businesses. They therefore know exactly what is involved, and are prepared to give young people the benefit of their time and expertise. More than 2,000 volunteers are needed each year to keep up the momentum, and I understand that the Prince of Wales recently wrote to every existing adviser asking him or her to recruit another volunteer. I wish the trust every success in that campaign.

As has been acknowledged today, we in the Government are extremely supportive of the trust's work. Indeed, we have provided substantial financial help over the years. In November 1988, on his 40th birthday, the Prince of Wales launched an appeal to raise £40 million from the private sector, and the then Secretary of State for Employment, Lord Young, promised to match that pound for pound. So far, we have given some £21 million in accordance with that promise, and our total maximum commitment currently stands at £31 million.

More recently, in March last year, we agreed to provide further funds focused on the more disadvantaged, especially the long-term unemployed and the disabled. Our maximum commitment over the next three years is £10 million, as has already been pointed out. That includes welcome contributions from the Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices.

Our contributions are designed to help the PYBT to maximise the funds it receives from the private sector. Both the schemes, which run alongside each other, are paid only on a matched-fund basis, pound for pound. At the trust's suggestion, the new scheme is also output-related: we pay £2,500 for each young person who is recruited and who survives for 15 months in business, which demonstrates the confidence that both the trust and the Government have in those young people. All that helps the trust to raise substantial private sector contributions to the cost of its work.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the interaction between the House of Commons and the trust. Is she aware that, last year, the Prince and his trust helped an all-party project known as "Return Ticket"? Long-term unemployed people were sent 30,000 books to give them hope, which has been afforded not least by the success stories emanating from the trust.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful both for my hon. Friend's interest in the trust and for his reminder of that important initiative.

The free advice that the trust gives each year is estimated to be worth about £30 million. Because of the leverage that our funds ensure, it hopes to double the number of young people that it supports as a result of the new scheme.

I am delighted to say that our research suggests that the young people who start businesses generally go on to set up thriving concerns: two thirds are still in business after two to three years, and a high proportion of those who sadly cease trading say that their experience with the PYBT has helped significantly to make it easier for them to find employment—or, indeed, to continue in some other form of self-employment.

I pay particular tribute to the work that the trust does in Kent, not least because I was recently privileged to go to a reception for young people who had set up businesses. I particularly remember a young man called Andrew Harsley, who had founded a very successful business making cable ties—perhaps because he was kind enough to give me a bunch of flowers tied up with one of his cable ties. I thought that that was a very nice gesture, and I wanted to put it on record and thank Mr. Harsley today.

The sheer diversity of the trust's businesses is amazing. They include both the more obvious concerns such as fashion, hairdressing and manufacturing, and unusual businesses such as sheep pregnancy testing, pet food delivery services and surfing. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have given many examples of specific initiatives, and paid tribute to them.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made an important contribution to the debate. He mentioned the fall-out from the circumstances of the South Thames training and enterprise council. As he will know, we are arranging for the TEC's functions to be taken over, but as a result of what he has said today I shall find out what specific arrangements have been made in relation to the PYBT and write to him as soon as I can.

I hope that the hon. Member will take that as an indication of the seriousness with which the Government view the trust, and our awareness of the importance of maintaining continuity. I take the hon. Gentleman's point: continuity is all, especially in the early stages.

The speech of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) was unusually emollient, which is in itself a tribute to the trust. It clearly has considerable appeal for all parties in the House. I do not think, however, that the hon. Gentleman's portrayal of our treatment of the business start-up scheme was altogether fair. He implied that it had been withdrawn. Our evaluation in 1991 suggested that some 80 per cent. of PYBT-supported businesses were in receipt of business start-up allowances, which did of course tend to increase unit costs from the Government's perspective.

The funds from the business start-up scheme have been transferred to the single regeneration budget, but that does not mean that they have been withdrawn. The budget will directly support some 18,000 new businesses in 1995-96; moreover, all projects supported by it will tend to help new businesses.

Mr. Barron: Is the Minister saying that the transfer of the money to the single regeneration budget will give those who benefit from the trust's work a weekly allowance for the first 12 months of the existence of their businesses?

Miss Widdecombe: I am saying that it is wrong to suggest that the fact that the business start-up scheme now functions as part of the single regeneration budgets means that it has ceased to function at all.

Some £40 million will be available in 1996-97 for the second round of bidding. That will build up to £200 million in the following year. Provision for the single regeneration budget over the next three years accounts for a substantial sum, of which more than £800 million will be provided for new projects.

It is for local partnerships to decide what priority to give to small business support. There is plenty of scope for the PYBT, and for other concerns, to work with local partners, as it is already doing in many parts of the country. I do not share the rather gloomy view of the hon. Member for Rother Valley: The change in procedures does not mean that we are any less committed to looking after small businesses.

Let me again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dover, and also congratulate the trust on the diversity of its work. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey pointed out, many women, disabled people and ethnic minorities have benefited from that work. The trust's scope is wide, encompassing both rural and urban areas, and the contribution that it makes, not only to the well-being and the economic prosperity of young people but to the well-being and the economic prosperity of the country is well worthy of the recognition that it has received today.

Women's Wages

11.29 am

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Today is International Women's Day and it is right to celebrate that with a debate about an issue that is dear to the hearts of many women, who comprise 51 per cent. of the people of this country. It is worth saying at the outset that there are at least 4 million low-paid women in this country. We define low pay as being below two thirds of the male median earnings.

That is not an insignificant number. Divided equally, on a geographical basis, it would mean that there are 6,000 low-paid women in every constituency in the United Kingdom. However, the geographical distribution of low pay is not completely even. In inner London, only 18 per cent. of women are low-paid, while in west Yorkshire the figure is 58 per cent.—a much higher figure. East Anglia, the part of the world that I represent, is often seen as more prosperous, but in fact 54 per cent. of women in East Anglia are low paid. That is perhaps a surprising figure, but East Anglia has low-paid employment in agriculture, hotel and catering, cleaning, the health service, social services, and many other jobs traditionally done by women.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The hon. Lady is saying that women earn less in certain parts of the country than in others. She is also a well-known supporter of the national minimum wage. If the national minimum wage were introduced, would there be a regional differences in the minimum wage?

Mrs. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the point that I was making. I said that the distribution of low pay was different in different regions. I will come to the minimum wage later. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will wait until I reach that point.

One of the rather surprising things—or perhaps it is not so surprising, given the national situation—is that in Cambridge and the surrounding areas there is a great deal of high-tech industry, but although people working in those industries are often highly paid, on the whole women are not benefiting from that high-tech industry which has grown so successfully in and around Cambridge over the past 15 years. I am pleased to say, however, that Doctor Elizabeth Garnsey of the Judge Institute in Cambridge is embarking on a study to determine why so few women are employed in the high-tech industries in the Cambridge region. It will be interesting to see the results of that study.

Much of the ground was covered in yesterday's debate, when Ministers and Conservative Members spent a great deal of time telling us of the tremendous improvements that had been made, and it is true that for some women life has got better over the past few years. There are more women in professional jobs, there are more women at the top of their professions and there are more women Members of Parliament, but that has not been achieved as a result of Government policies; it has been achieved despite the Conservative Government.

A good way of illustrating that is to look at how the number of women Members of Parliament has increased. It has increased because the Labour party has taken positive steps to improve the chances for women in our

[Mrs. Campbell]

party, and we are continuing to take those steps, which bring nothing but criticism and carping from Conservative Members.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): We all welcome the increase in the numbers of women who manage to rise to the top of their professions, but does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that just 5 per cent. of professors in higher education and 6 per cent. of QCs and High Court judges are women is not exactly a startling achievement as we approach the end of the 20th century?

Mrs. Campbell: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Although some progress has been made, the situation is far from satisfactory and certainly does not merit the kind of complacency that we have seen from Front-Bench Conservative Members.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): My hon. Friend referred to the Labour party's determined efforts to ensure that our electoral representation in the House reflects Great Britain, where half the population is female. Does she not find the schizophrenia of Conservative Members on this issue fascinating when they attack—*[Interruption.]*—and laugh at the fact that the Labour party has quotas for women but fail to acknowledge that the deputy chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), is frequently given permission to be away from the House to try to persuade constituency associations to comply with the Conservative party's target of 50 per cent for women candidates? Is not the only difference the fact that the Labour party is serious about it and the Conservatives are willing the means?

Mrs. Campbell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Conservatives are trying to improve on their 63 women candidates in the past election compared with Labour's 138.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Even hon. Ladies must take their seats. The debate is about wage levels for women. It is not really about party politics and which party has which candidates.

Mrs. Campbell: As women Members of Parliament are perhaps more highly paid than other women, an increase in their numbers will help in a small way to raise wage levels for women.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: Perhaps the hon. Lady will wait until I have made a further point.

If we define low pay as less than two thirds of a full-time median wage—not just men's wages, but taking men and women's wages together—we can compare ourselves with our European partners.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St Edmunds): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: Not at the moment.

In Belgium, for example, which has clear minimum wage legislation, less than 5 per cent. of women come into the category of low-paid. In the Netherlands, which also has minimum wage legislation, although perhaps not quite so good, only 11 per cent. of women come within the definition of low-paid. In Ireland, however, the figure rises dramatically to 18 per cent., in Spain it is 19 per cent. and the UK tops the European Union tree with 20 per cent. That says something important about the effect of a minimum wage on low pay for women.

Mr. Spring: Will the hon. Lady specify what she is saying in quantitative terms? She has defined low pay as being two thirds of male median earnings. What are male median earnings in quantitative terms? Unless we know that figure, talking about low pay and linking it with some kind of poverty makes no sense whatever.

Mrs. Campbell: I have the figures and I can inform the hon. Gentleman that, according to the 1994 wages survey, male median earnings were around £300 per week, so two thirds of male median earnings is a little over £200 a week. The hon. Gentleman can find those figures quite easily if he would like to look them up. In the last case, I was talking about two thirds of the full-time median wage, taking both men's and women's pay together.

Yesterday the Trades Union Congress launched a new document, "The New Divide". It is a study of the pay of part-time workers. The TUC says something that is important for us all to take on board, and we should celebrate the contribution that part-time workers make to the economy. Many men and women want to work part time because of family responsibilities, others perhaps want to study at the same time or they may be caring for elderly parents. There are all sorts of reasons why people want to work part time. We should encourage that if it is what people want to do. But why should part-time work mean low pay and worse conditions than those of people in full-time employment?

It is shocking that half a million part-time workers, mainly women, earn less than £2.49 an hour. That is disgraceful, and it is an indictment of the Government's complete lack of policy on earnings and incomes. Many workers earn less than the national insurance threshold, which is currently £57 per week. Those workers not only take home low pay but lose a number of contributory benefits, especially pensions, so those who are poor at work tend to be poor in old age as well.

In the context of social justice, it is obviously important for part-time workers to be treated in the same way as full-time workers. With more people choosing to work part time, it is becoming more essential to treat people equally. The Government have an appalling record and have continually tried to block part-time workers' rights. Following the House of Lords ruling in March 1994 that the Government were acting illegally in denying employment rights to part-time workers, in December last year the Government were forced to give equal rights to part-timers.

The Secretary of State for Employment last year blocked European directives on parental leave which would have been of enormous help to men and women in employment. That now has to be introduced under the social protocol, which excludes the UK and means that our workers are not able to benefit from it.

The Equal Opportunities Commission has produced a good report on low pay and women. The report identifies that low pay is associated with having children and/or caring responsibilities and having a part-time job. I can

illustrate how that affects ordinary people from the letters of one of my constituents. She is a highly qualified woman with a degree in microbiology. In her letter to me she describes how she had worked while living with the father of her two children. He became violent and threw her out. As a single parent she was able to draw £600 a month in benefit.

However, when she tried to go back to her job, which was quite well paid compared with most of the jobs that women are able to get, the loss of benefit and the cost of child care reduced her income from £600 to £450 a month. Not surprisingly, with two children, that woman found that quite impossible to live on. She wrote to me pointing out how ridiculous it was that the Government were paying her £600 a month to stay on benefit rather than £150 a month to be in work. That is the amount that she would have needed to bring her income up to what she had while on benefit. That is absurd.

It is essential to increase opportunities for women by increasing the provision of low-cost publicly funded child care and abolishing the anomaly by which people can reclaim tax on their secretary's wages but not on child-minding costs. It is no coincidence that, on the whole, men employ secretaries and women employ child minders, and it is clear discrimination that the one is allowable against tax while the other is not.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): It would be discourteous to allow the debate to go much further without congratulating the hon. Lady and her lady colleagues on having overcome the ingrained male chauvinism within her party to which she referred earlier. Not one male Labour Member is in the Chamber or has been here since the start of the debate. Does the hon. Lady feel that that is a symptom of the fact that perhaps there is still a long way to go? There is an empty space where one male Labour Member was sitting, so I apologise for being incorrect in that, but certainly no one has bothered to stay. The one who was here left as soon as the hon. Lady started to speak, which was grossly discourteous.

Mrs. Campbell: I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) has slipped out for a few moments and will be back. He was here at the beginning of the debate. The Opposition can celebrate the fact that we have enough women to keep the debate going without falling back on our male colleagues. The Conservative party would dearly love to solve the problem of having too few women hon. Members, but it has no idea how to go about it.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: I have given way a number of times and I will give way to the hon. Lady later. At the moment I should like to make some further progress.

It is important to look at ways of increasing access to existing child care, and we also need to increase the amount of it. I am pleased that in my constituency we have been able to put together a project involving the city and county councils, the local employment agency office, the training and enterprise councils from Cambridge and Greater Peterborough, the Cambridge Training and Development Organisation, which is a private training body, and the Benefits Agency.

We have formed a working party to look at ways to make child care and work more accessible to those who wish to return to work after a period of being at home and looking after children. We have decided to have points around the city to give information through the form of a one-stop shop so that people can find out where child care and training opportunities are to be found, where they are likely to find a job and what difference that will make to their benefits. That is to say, they can discover what their income will be at the end of the day.

We plan to make that service accessible through a computer-based system which will, of course, be linked to the information super-highway. I am pleased that the project has attracted all-party support in Cambridge. Of course, we cannot pursue it without money, and I am pleased that all the major banks, plus Philips Telecom, some of the Cambridge colleges and two training and enterprise councils, have contributed substantial sums to get the scheme off the ground. That shows how important people think it is to have good quality child care and to give people proper access to it to enable them to get back to work.

Labour party policy on the minimum wage has been mentioned. The statistics show that it is essential to have a minimum wage to help the 3 million British workers who earn less than £3.50 an hour. Four out of five low-paid people are women. We have only to look at the stories of people on very high salaries to realise that there are not many women among them. Mr. Cedric Brown springs to mind immediately, and the National Grid chairman recently managed to effect a pay deal worth £2 million. There is no chance of that person being a woman. A 28-year-old man on £200,000 a year managed to break a bank but did not contribute much to the economy in the process.

The Low Pay Unit has come up with examples of people being offered extremely low pay, not in a covert way but by advertisement in Government job centres. There are examples of shop workers being offered £1.66 an hour and hairdressers being offered £1.43 an hour. How could anyone survive on such wages? They are totally disgraceful.

Despite the rhetoric of Conservative Members, economists in Britain and America who have studied low pay have concluded that a statutory minimum wage does not cost jobs and may even increase employment. That is what the research is showing. Time and again, we hear Conservative Members say that we must not let workers price themselves out of jobs. Let us consider, however, what happened in 1990 when the United States Government raised the national minimum wage to the equivalent of approximately £2.70 an hour. Despite everyone's efforts, study after study found that that was effective in raising the income of some of the poorest people in America, and that it had done so without jobs being lost.

A further example is the east coast state of New Jersey, where local legislators raised the minimum wage to $5.05 an hour, compared with the state of Pennsylvania where the minimum wage was only $4.25 an hour. If what the Conservative party is saying is correct, one would have expected jobs to increase in Pennsylvania and to decrease in New Jersey, but that did not happen. Economists examined one sector of the industry—fast food restaurants, where wages are traditionally low—in both states. They found that employment had fallen in cheap-rate Pennsylvania but risen in higher-rate New

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Jersey—the reverse of what the Conservatives claim would happen. The research simply does not bear out the points that they make.

Mr. Spring: Is the hon. Lady aware that in the United States the rate of female participation in the labour market is significantly lower than in the United Kingdom and that the percentage of earnings gained by females in the United States does not compare favourably with that in the UK?

Mrs. Campbell: I do not see how the hon. Gentleman's point refers to the minimum wage, but it is true that there are far more fragmented part-time jobs in the United States than in the UK.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Does my hon. Friend agree that Conservative Members are not interested in the research, that they do not consider it and that they do not care? They believe ideologically in low pay. They cannot stand the idea of a minimum wage. They attack it constantly because they crudely and ideologically believe in market forces. They cannot believe that paying people a decent rate is a proper social policy, and therefore they are not listening to the research that my hon. Friend has outlined.

Mrs. Campbell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. She is right. If Conservative Members are not interested in the facts, they should stop making comments which are not true.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: I am not giving way again as I wish to make some progress.

Low pay tends to increase staff turnover and to make it much more difficult to recruit staff, so firms often lose business because they are unable to meet orders. They also face much higher training costs, because a constant turnover of staff means that they will have to train people more frequently. Firms which pay low wages do not do well. Some of the squeals that we have heard from employers in the past few weeks should be taken with a pinch of salt, because the evidence does not bear out what they are saying.

Since the Government abolished wages councils, which set minimum rates for workers in the retail, hotel, hairdressing and other trades, hourly wage rates have decreased. According to Government theories, when wage rates go down we should naturally expect an increase in vacancies, but that has not happened. The Low Pay Unit found that, after wages councils were abolished, employment in the hotel trade decreased.*[Interruption.]*

Ms Eagle: Did my hon. Friend pick up the little sedentary comment from the Conservative Benches—that jobs fell in the hotel trade because of the recession? Conservative Members seem to think that it is acceptable to have lower wages and fewer jobs.

Mrs. Campbell: For the past two years, the Government have been telling us that we are coming out of recession, that we are in a boom period, that we should all expect to be feeling much better and that there should be a feel-good factor, but if they are now saying that we are in recession, that directly contradicts what they said previously.

No other country is considering abandoning the minimum wage and the constraints that we had under the wages councils. Not even Newt Gingrich is proposing the abolition of the minimum wage in the United States. We should recognise that minimum wages encourage people to work instead of staying at home on benefit. We want to encourage that, and we thought that the Conservative party was in favour of it.

We have one of the worst records in Europe on women's wage levels, and poverty at work leads to poverty in old age. We need to improve conditions and pay for part-timers, and we should not block European directives intended to help them. We desperately need to ensure access to good quality publicly funded child care, so that women can work without worrying about their children. Because the Government have so resolutely turned their face against a minimum wage, which has been widely adopted in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, we need to ensure electoral victory for a Labour Government, who will introduce a minimum wage and increase opportunities for all women.

11.56 am

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to say a few words. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), my near neighbour, on securing an Adjournment debate on this important subject.

I remember the hon. Lady's maiden speech some three years ago, as I was in the Chamber at the time. Although it was a good maiden speech, I recall her painting a gloomy picture of life in her constituency. I hope that she will acknowledge that all over East Anglia, and most notably in Cambridge, dramatic falls in unemployment have begun to take place. That is to be welcomed. Male and female workers alike have benefited from that. East Anglia is enjoying the fastest rate of economic recovery of any region in the United Kingdom. I hope that the hon. Lady will recognise that, in the past three years, job opportunities for females and female participation in the labour market have expanded markedly, both in her constituency and in East Anglia.

The hon. Lady is right to refer to the gap between male and female earnings. In many respects, that is not acceptable. Members of Parliament are paid the same amount, whether they are male or female, and it would be preposterous if it were otherwise. That principle should be extended across many other spheres of employment. The Labour party's policies, however, are destined to destroy the very job opportunities which have caused so many women to make such tremendous and remarkable strides in employment since 1979.

Of all the European Union countries, only the UK has a lower unemployment rate for women—currently 4.6 per cent.—than for men. Compared with the larger countries in the European Union, the participation rate by women in the UK labour market is at the highest level.

Ms Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman admit that the number of hours that women work in Britain is the lowest in the European Union? That means that many women are working fewer hours than they would prefer because of the constraints of lack of child care and non-availability of decently paid employment.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Lady misses the point entirely. The purpose of a dynamic and flexible economy is to create job opportunities. The policies that she espouses would destroy job opportunities and the enormous progress that women have made in the labour market in the past 15 years. It cannot be denied that there is a gap, but it has been closing partly because of legislation and partly because cultural attitudes to female employment have rightly moved on. I welcome that, but what is needed is a competitive, efficient and flexible labour market and a Government committed to widening choice and opportunity for everyone. The surge in flexible working has been greatly welcomed by women employees and we are seeing the fruits of that flexibility.

Let us examine whether that supposition is backed by the facts. In 1970, average gross weekly earnings for women were 54.3 per cent. of men's earnings. By 1994, the figure had risen to 72.2 per cent., and the figure for full-time hourly earnings is now 79 per cent. That is due to an expansion—both relative and absolute—of female earnings.

Ms Corston: The hon. Gentleman talks about the desirability of flexibility in the labour market. Will he explain the desirability of zero-hours employment contracts, which are increasing especially in the shop and hotel sector, whereby employers do not contract to provide any hours of work for employees but employees have to be available for work at all times? Whose opportunities are increased by such contracts?

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. In my constituency, where employment has increased substantially and where the tourism and hotel sectors are expanding, unemployment has dropped to 4.6 per cent. precisely because of such flexibility. If we had the regulated labour market and total lack of flexibility advocated by the Labour party, there would be no such employment opportunities and unemployment in my constituency would double.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spring: I will deal with the increase in female earnings and then give way to the hon. Lady.

In the four or five years since 1990, female earnings have risen by 30 per cent., compared with a rise of 23 per cent. in men's earnings. Again, Labour's policies would destroy that growth because of the ossification of opportunities that would certainly arise. The female activity rate continues to rise while the male activity rate continues to fall.

An article in *The Guardian*—so it must be true—written by Edward Balls in September last year stated :

"Since the early seventies female employment has risen by a fifth, while male employment has fallen by the same percentage."

He is the same Mr. Edward Balls who, significantly, contributed to the intellectual thrust of the Labour party's economic policy—namely, the introduction of a neo-classical endogenous growth theory and symbiotic relationships—so what he says must be of great interest to the Labour party.

Ms Eagle: It was not a neo-classical endogenous growth theory, but a post-neo-classical endogenous growth theory which recognises that labour markets and the supply and demand curve which so obsesses free-market Conservatives simply do not represent the real world.

Mr. Spring: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's attempt to clarify Labour's economic policy. During the years that I spent at university learning about economics and hearing a catholic spread of ideas, at no time did I hear a theory along those lines. It has nothing to do with the real world and made the Labour party a laughing stock.

It is most impressive that female self-employment has risen by 80 per cent. since 1981. The hon. Member for Cambridge will know that the small business sector in East Anglia is one of the most important elements of growth in our part of Britain. Our economy is very much based on small business. In the late 1980s, a considerable part of the expansion in employment during the boom period was in the small business sector. The fact that so many more women are deciding to become self-employed in that sector is greatly to be welcomed.

Lady Olga Maitland: Is my hon. Friend aware that one in four small businesses are now started by women, who are making a considerable success of them? Indeed, banks tell me that they would rather give a loan to a woman because they know that she will be successful.

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out. I am sure that she is correct. I hope that in future there will be many more women entrepreneurs who will start and build seedcorn businesses like the Body Shop and many others that have been so commercially successful.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Cambridge agrees that the key to employment success and higher wages for women lies in education. There is a clear relationship between professional success and education. When the Labour party was in office, one in eight young people went on to higher education, a figure that was regarded as a scandal in the 1970s. It is now one in three, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Cambridge welcomes that.

Below university level, we find that, in 1979, under a Labour Government, 44 per cent. of A-level entrants were female, but the figure has risen to 52 per cent. under the Conservatives. In 1979, 40 per cent. of full-time students in higher education were female; today, 48 per cent. are female and their number is growing. If one adds the figure for those in further education, more than half the students are female. In the same period, three fifths of those involved in further education are female compared to two fifths when Labour were in power.

I am sure that the hon. Lady welcomes the tremendous progress that has been made and is anxious to share the following information. At Cambridge university in the 1970s, one in four undergraduates were female, but the figure is now 43 per cent. and rising. All this shows what a dynamic, open and growing economy is doing to create opportunities for women.

[Mr. Spring]

There is clear evidence of increasing and very welcome professional success among women. An article in the *Financial Times* of 22 August 1994 carried the headline "Women 'beating men for top jobs'". It stated:

"Women prove more successful than men when they are competing for senior management positions, statistics released by an executive recruitment consultancy show.

The survey, which focused on 85 posts in the £30,000 to £75,000 salary range handled by the London office of NB Selection, found that from the shortlisted candidates for the posts one in four women, compared with one in six men, secured management positions.

The company also examined the sample of 31 vacancies covering 3,000 applicants and found that, proportionately, women again fared better. Some 22 per cent. of women applicants secured interviews compared with 10 per cent. of male applicants."

I am sure that everyone welcomes the considerable professional success at management level that is now manifesting itself and which will certainly continue to boost female earnings.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is painting an extremely rosy picture, but is he aware that the recent trend towards more women in management has gone into reverse? A recent survey shows that 9.5 per cent. of managers in 1993 were women, compared with 10.3 per cent. in 1992. Only 2.8 per cent. of directors were women. Those figures are taken from the Institute of Management survey of 1994. The hon. Gentleman must admit that there are large problems.

Mr. Spring: From the figures that I have given, the hon. Lady will accept that progress for women in professional life is strong. I entirely welcome that, and I hope that it will go further. However, I do not especially want to bandy around endless surveys.

I come next to the employment forecast for women to the year 2000, put out by no less an organisation than the Equal Opportunities Commission, working together with the Institute for Employment Research. The report shows that the proportion of women in the labour force has increased steadily despite the last recession. Using a forecasting model which relates activity rates to various socio-economic variables, the author of the report finds that

"women are likely to increase their share in almost all occupations, particularly in the managerial, professional and associated professional areas where they are currently under-represented.

For example, the proportion of female corporate managers is predicted to grow from 30.5 per cent. in 1991 to 39.6 per cent. by 2000. Over the same period the female proportion of science- and engineering-associated professionals is expected to increase from 22.5 per cent. to 29.9 per cent. and in other associated professional occupations from 38.9 per cent. to 44 per cent."

I hope that the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) agrees that such a report, produced by an impartial body, is especially welcome.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): What was markedly lacking in the list of figures that the hon. Gentleman shared with the House was any mention of wages. Can he furnish us with those figures and perhaps with details of the differentials between men's and women's wages which still exist in every area of working life?

Mr. Spring: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. There is a gap, but it is closing. There is a direct correlation between education, professional accomplishment and wage levels. The point that I am trying to make is that, as more women rightly occupy senior positions, the gap will close. It is now closing rapidly as a result of a mixture of legislation and a dynamic economy which produces growth opportunities for everyone in the labour market.

Ms Jackson: The hon. Gentleman agrees, I presume, with his Government's view that low wages create more jobs. On the point to which he has devoted so many figures, does he therefore believe that the way to close the gap between male and female employment in managerial positions is to lower wages in those positions?

Mr. Spring: I believe that, in a growing and dynamic economy which provides job opportunities, we shall see general standards of living rising. Those living standards will be based on an increase in average earnings in a non-inflationary economy. That is to be wholly welcomed.

Since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister launched in 1991 his well-known initiative to increase the proportion of women appointed by Government to public bodies, the proportion of women holding public appointments has risen from 5 per cent. to 28 per cent. The Government are committed to equality and to a comprehensive legal framework. We have a legislative foundation. We have seen clear evidence that women are advancing, rightly, at all levels. We have seen clear evidence that the gap in earnings is closing and will continue to close, and I wholly welcome that.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spring: I must conclude.

At the heart of this remains one point that is crystal clear. All that I have described can happen only if we have an open, free and dynamic marketplace economy providing the opportunity. What we do not need is the imposition of a social chapter, which will destroy jobs, and a minimum wage which has had catastrophic employment consequences for both men and women across the European Union. The way that I have described is the way in which women can advance, and that is the way in which, under a Conservative Government, that is now happening.

12.14 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I am conscious that there is limited time in the debate so I shall be brief, if hon. Members will allow me.

There are some areas in which there is a common awareness of the difficulties women face. We all recognise that women have made great strides over the past 20 years and that more women are now in paid employment than at any other time. The gap between male and female wages has narrowed. As the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) said, women now take up more than half of all further and higher education places. We can say that for some women, especially young, childless women from white, well-educated middle-income backgrounds, equality of opportunity has become a reality, but for many others, the old injustices and inequalities remain and new problems limiting their choice have arisen.

On average, women who work full time are still paid only 79 per cent. of the pay of their male counterparts. A large majority of those who earn less than half the national average wage are women. The large majority of pensioners on income support are women. Some 90 per cent. of all lone parents are women. The vast majority of employees with the primary responsibility for caring for children, caring for the elderly and caring for the sick are women. Women make up 44 per cent. of the United Kingdom work force, but only 20 per cent. of our managers and a mere 2 per cent. of senior executives.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the hon. Gentleman share my disappointment that there are no women chief police constables?

Mr. Chidgey: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. Indeed, I share her disappointment. That point illustrates the problem of discrimination to which I shall come later.

The Low Pay Unit recently reported that half of all full-time women workers and three quarters of all part-time women workers earned less than 68 per cent. of the average wage. We heard earlier that some 4 million women earn low wages. The latest figures from the Low Pay Unit tell us that 6.5 million women are earning low wages. Two thirds of low-paid workers are women. More than 70 per cent. of those earning less than £3 an hour are women. Women are the primary victims of low-wage exploitation. I am sorry about the continual recounting of figures, but I believe that they illustrate the fact that women are the victims in this respect.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that women would far rather have a job than not? Does he also accept that Britain has the second-highest proportion of working women in Europe? We are second only to Denmark. Does he agree that a woman with a job, even a part-time job, is better off than a woman who has no money at all?

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Lady repeats points made earlier, which is a waste of the time of the House. I do not believe that we should expect anybody, woman or man, to work for wages that are akin to slavery. I do not believe that this country should move towards a third-world economy. It is women who are exploited, because they have fewer choices.

We need to have a flexible, but firm, approach to low wages. We need to establish a regionally based minimum hourly rate in determining wages. We need a minimum hourly rate which is agreed by employers and by representatives of trade and commerce, working closely with a low pay commission. We need to protect the vulnerable from the unscrupulous; women are usually at the sharp end of that.

Low wages are not the only problem. Our tax and benefits system discriminates against women. We need reforms to present going to work as a genuine option. We need to remove the mechanisms in the tax and benefits systems that reduce economic independence for women and stifle opportunity. We should remove the lower rate of national insurance contribution on earnings of less than £3,445. We could take 50,000 low-paid workers out of the tax system altogether by that simple move. That would help mainly women.

Ms Short: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's proposal is well meant, but has he looked at the lower threshold? Something like 3 million people, mostly women, are trapped beneath it with no entitlement to pensions or anything else. It becomes an incentive to employers to pay their workers wages that are just below that threshold and to keep them low so that those workers never receive any national insurance benefits or other entitlements, which is a real problem.

Mr. Chidgey: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady. That is one of the basic reasons why we need to look closely at our tax and benefits systems to try to avoid such exploitation.

On that very point, many women's employment is severely disrupted, usually because they have taken on the responsibility of bringing up children at some stage during their lives. They therefore have incomplete contributory records, which, of course, lead to all the disadvantages of the future loss of entitlements. We need to move towards phasing in a system of benefits and pensions which are paid on the basis of residence and to merge the national insurance contributions into the same tax base as income tax. That may begin to overcome some of the problems mentioned.

We need to examine how carers are treated. Changes in the contributory principle would help to remove some of the benefit system's built-in disadvantages to carers. We also need to consider training provision. Training for work and increasing employability are vital, and improvements in education, training and skill levels would bring the greatest benefit to the low-paid, who, again, are mainly women.

I shall sum up briefly, because I know that there is little time.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman mentioned training. Does he agree that the representation of women on training and enterprise council boards is lamentable and that there are very few women throughout the entire TEC system? Does he agree that it would be much better to have better representation of women on TEC boards?

Mr. Chidgey: TEC boards need to be reviewed because there is widespread under-representation, not only of women. I am particularly concerned that small firms are inadequately represented on TEC boards, yet they often need the most help, liaison and dialogue about training needs. Many small firms have never engaged in training, and their under-representation is a great flaw in the system.

Most importantly, we need to improve anti-discrimination policies. Better child care provision, improvements to the tax and benefits system, minimum hourly rates, improvements in training, and so on are all peripheral if the central issue of discrimination is not tackled. Replacement of the Sex Discrimination Acts and the Equal Pay Act 1970 by an equal treatment Act would help to counter all discrimination, unintentional as well as intentional. Employers should take responsibility for ensuring that the inequalities in pay and conditions are not the result of discrimination.

The approach to policies that I have tried to outline in my short speech would ensure that, in future, all employees were paid according to the quality of their work, not according to their gender. We need to help ensure that the structural imbalances which prevent women from getting and retaining the sort of work that they want are removed. Women should have the same

[Mr. Chidgey]

opportunities as men. The aim of the Liberal Democrats is not equality of outcome, but equality of opportunity. We do not propose special treatment for women, but equal treatment.

12.22 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I particularly warmly welcome the fact that this debate is taking place at all. I say that because I have worked all my adult life and I have never felt in any way discriminated against by wage levels because of my sex. I have worked as a secretary and I have never felt discriminated against. The Labour party asks why there are not more male secretaries. I have not had a single male apply to be my secretary.

Ms Eagle: I am sure that the hon. Lady would like to know that I have a male secretary and he is extremely good.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am delighted for the hon. Lady and I am sure that he gives her excellent service.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Discrimination is not left to the individual to feel or to recognise. We are arguing that the discrimination from which millions of women suffer is set in place by an employer who makes a distinction between a male and a female employee. Women are discriminated against quite deliberately. They earn less money. It is not a feeling or a sense; it is a fact.

Lady Olga Maitland: Women earn less money partly because of the kind of job that they do. From my experience in whatever area I worked, whether in Fleet street as a junior reporter or as a head of a department, I know that I always had the same salary as everybody else. The Government are concerned about the iniquities which may arise, which is why they set up the Equal Opportunities Commission and, indeed, pour £5 million—

Ms Short: It was set up by a Labour Government.

Lady Olga Maitland: Oh, well, I withdraw that remark. None the less, this Government pour £5 million a year into the commission to ensure that women get a fair deal.

This is a very artificial debate. It is the result of the spin doctors in the Labour party trying hard to get the women's vote. They say to themselves, "Ah, the women's issue." It is all meticulously planned, the ball is set rolling down the road and the Labour women, if I may say so, just do as they are bid.

More than that, the Labour party is saying, "Let's attract the women's vote by offering baubles." It is looking, for instance, at different forms of tax relief. Indeed, I read with the greatest interest an article in *She* magazine, which featured the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who said that he would look at tax relief for child care—in other words, a nannies charter. I am sure that the poor working woman would not be very happy to find that her increased taxes are paying for nannies for wealthy women.

I regard this debate as the product of a rather cynical ploy that will not work. The Labour party totally underestimates the intelligence of the British woman. We are not that easily fooled. The women who come to see me in my surgery do not talk about the issues that the women in the Labour party raise or about sexist issues. They say that they want a stable, sustainable economy, which is dynamic and which will give them jobs for themselves and their husbands, which we all want.

They welcome the fact that unemployment has fallen by 500,000 over the past two years and they welcome the fact that in Sutton the number of unemployed people is barely 300 above the peak unemployment level of 1986. We should be looking at the real issues of how we are helping women.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lady Olga Maitland: Very well, for a moment.

Dr. Jones: What does the hon. Lady say to the 80 per cent. of women who earn less than half the median rate paid to male workers about her Government's policies of removing the protection which was provided by wages councils, which has led to those low levels of pay being further reduced? Is she not concerned about the low levels of pay that so many women have to put up with?

Lady Olga Maitland: I am always concerned about wage levels for all people. This cant of positive discrimination totally overlooks the main issue, which is ensuring that our economy is dynamic and determined to help all women.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose—*

Lady Olga Maitland: I shall not give way any more. The hon. Gentleman has only just arrived, and tokenism is not acceptable today. Time is tight and precious and I want to address a very important issue which was raised by the Labour party yesterday and has been raised again today, about the lack of a national child care strategy.

If the House wants a national care strategy, it should look to the Conservative Government, because we are doing just that. They have an excellent record on child care. Does anybody give us any praise? No. Why does not the Labour party acknowledge that 90 per cent. of all three to four-year-old children are in some form of education or organised day care? Why does the Labour party not thank us for that? Why does it not accept it? It certainly takes advantage of it. Why does the Labour party not praise our Prime Minister, who has set the target that over time he will provide a pre-school place for every four-year-old whose parents wish to take it up.

Why does the Labour party not welcome the fact that in 1992 there were 133,600 places in registered day nurseries and nursery places—more than double the number in 1983? Why do Labour Members stay silent on that? In 1993, there were 296,000 places with registered childminders, and childminding increased by 40 per cent. between 1988 and 1991. What a fantastic track record.

We know that we have a record of helping women—a record of which we are proud. The Conservative party will carry far more credibility in the cause of women than the Labour party will.

12.30 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate, especially as I was involved in Committees yesterday and could not attend yesterday's Supply day debate on women. I note that, for two years

running, we have had debates in Opposition time on the extremely important subject of the position of women in society, and what kind of progress is being made.

Today's debate has been won by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), and I congratulate her on having secured it—but we still await a debate in Government time. If the Conservative party is really so interested in the progress of women and wishes to spend time demonstrating to us how central the issue is, the Government might at least condescend to give the House time to discuss it at length. I certainly hope that they will, but in 16 years of Conservative rule we have yet to see it happen.

Women constitute the majority of those in low-paid and insecure employment, and in the deregulated labour market insecurity is growing and wages have been falling, ably aided and abetted by the Government's abolition of the wages councils two years ago. As a result of that, in the affected sectors 42 per cent. of the part-time vacancies overall—and 75 per cent. in some sectors—are for jobs that still pay less than the low wage rates stipulated by the wages councils when they were abolished two years ago.

Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) said that almost 75,000 people, most of whom are women, now earn less than £1.50 an hour. How on earth can anyone keep his or her life together, try to support someone else or have any kind of dignity in the world earning such a wage? There are 200,000 people who still earn less than £2.70 an hour. Again, most of them are women.

We must abolish such low wages in our economy. Working for such low wages does not aid dignity, and is unlikely to allow for training or to lead to career prospects. It is merely exploitation, and we should see it for what it is.

There is an interesting discussion that always takes place about the minimum wage. Of course, the minimum wage and the arguments about it are at the core of the pretty fundamental disagreements between the main political parties on such issues. We believe that a minimum wage will help to banish exploitative jobs from the economy.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Lady is right to say that that is a fundamental point, and I invite her to examine other European countries in which the minimum wage exists. For example, in Spain 35 per cent. of young people are unemployed, and in France the proportion is 25 per cent. The hon. Lady talks about exploitation, but there is nothing more cruel than the exploitation of having no hope, no job and no prospects. That is the tyranny of the minimum wage, where it exists, right across Europe.

Ms Eagle: I fear that the hon. Gentleman is mixing up different economic effects. I do not think that the existence of the minimum wage has created that high youth unemployment in other countries, or that it would create it here.

In the lower income sectors in this country wages are so low that the Government now subsidise, via top-up benefits to the tune of billions of pounds, the employers who pay those low wages. Some recent parliamentary answers have demonstrated how much taxpayers' money is paid to employers to exploit their work forces, and that is neither economically efficient nor morally acceptable. A Labour Government would certainly get rid of it.

The argument that a minimum wage would destroy jobs has been demonstrated to be false this side of the second world war. In the early 1970s, there were discussions about introducing equal pay legislation, and the Conservative party—which, by the way, opposed equal pay legislation all down the line, and also opposed the introduction of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) praised—told us all that millions of women's jobs would be destroyed and that women would be forced back into the home.

Conservatives said that the paradoxical effect of the Labour Government's pushing for equal pay legislation to improve some of the low wages, and of their trying at least to ensure equality between men and women, would be to push women back into the home. But what has happened since the legislation was put on the statute book?

Mr. Gunnell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Eagle: I shall give way in a minute, but I was going to explain what has happened since the legislation was passed.

There has been a massive increase in the number of women entering the work force. Because of the Government's economic incompetence, there has also been a massive decrease in full-time male employment, which has been partly replaced by part-time female employment. It is estimated that nine out of every 10 jobs created between now and the year 2000 will be part-time and will be taken by women. Whatever has happened as a result of equal pay legislation, it has not been the destruction of women's jobs in the economy. The opposite has happened.

I now give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell).

Mr. Gunnell: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and for not showing the discrimination against males shown by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, who also spoke about equal pay. I do not think that my hon. Friend will recall the time when equal pay for teachers was won, but is she aware of the enormous opposition to that proposition by the male teachers union that was afterwards absorbed into another union? It put up a tremendous fight on the ground that equal pay would depress the wages of males because women teachers' earnings were merely a second wage.

Ms Eagle: My hon. Friend makes a valid point.

Now we see the pattern repeating itself. The Labour party puts legislation on the statute book and argues for the further advance of women in our society, against discrimination where it exists and in favour of equal treatment, whereas the Conservative party spends all its time and resources opposing those moves every step of the way. Yet, when the legislation is on the statute book, Conservatives later claim that they supported it all along.

Mr. Spring: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Eagle: I have only three minutes left, so I do not want to give way at this stage.

We must realise that there is always a fight to enable women to take their rightful place in society. Where there are areas in which women have not yet arrived, the Conservatives will always oppose any change. I read

[Ms Eagle]

yesterday's debate in *Hansard*, and there was nothing but carping about the quota system and the way in which the Labour party is seeking to integrate women into political life. Of course that is relevant to today's debate, because the more women we have here and in other decision-making areas, the more likely we are to be able to combat the low pay and discrimination that currently exist for women throughout their working lives, and even in the shape of the pensions industry.

The Labour party, by introducing the state earnings-related pensions scheme, gave women equality in pensions provision for the first time, but the Conservative Government have now made two attacks on that, which have reduced the value of SERPS to one quarter of what it would have been had it been left undisturbed.

The Conservatives destroy women's opportunities and oppose any attempt to make progress and to create equality. Because those things are so popular, they realise that they must pretend to be in favour of equality, but they do nothing about it. The first woman Prime Minister did nothing to help women make their way in society, except by the pure example she gave as the first ever woman Prime Minister. That was a powerful example, but she did nothing in legislation to help women. She showed contempt for the idea of allowing women to make progress in society.

Mr. Spring *rose—*

Ms Eagle: I am sorry, but I have little time left and cannot give way.

One final thing which we must get right is affordable child care for women who wish to go to work. I am a member of the Employment Select Committee, which has been looking carefully at child care, and a report is due next week. The Committee has been overwhelmed by the sheer logic of the case to provide decent and affordable child care for women who want to go out to work. We were particularly concerned about the plight of lone parents. Fewer lone parents now work because of unacceptable benefit traps than worked 10 or 20 years ago.

The Opposition are addressing the issues of social policy seriously, and that is shown by the fact that we keep having debates in Opposition time—

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Endless debates.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman may say that the debates are endless, but, frankly, the Government provide us with no time to discuss the issues. The hon. Gentleman has just wandered in at the end of the debate, and he has not even deigned to grace us with his presence. At least the Opposition provide time in the House to discuss issues which are important to 51 per cent. of the population.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge on securing the debate. We shall continue to push the issues because we know that justice must be done for women through the political process. We will fight to gain that justice, and we will not stop until we have equal opportunities and a proper place in society—whether the Conservative party likes it or not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Ms Clare Short.

12.41 pm

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also spoke in yesterday's debate, when Madam Speaker was in the Chair.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on introducing this debate. The issues which we are debating go to the heart of the difference in values between the Tory party and the British Labour party. We are approaching the end of a failed economic experiment known as Thatcherism. The experiment encouraged a belief that inequality is good for people and for the economy and a belief that one had to remove all protections for low-paid workers and let the market rip. Workers had to find their rate, no matter how low it might be. One had to stop taxing the wealthy, so that they could get rich and not pay taxes.

The moral contradiction at the core of the experiment is that the rich have to get richer to get more efficiency while the poor have to get poorer. Those are the core values of Thatcherism. The Opposition have always said that the Government were demonstrating a morally bankrupt set of values which was causing great pain to the British people. Galbraith said that Britain would do a service to the people of the world by testing those ideas to destruction in a fairly homogeneous and stable society. We have paid the price, and we have proved that those values are economically incompetent. Enormous damage has been done to the British economy by the present Government while they have conducted an experiment which has promoted inequality and inefficiency in the economy.

Conservative Members suggest that women Opposition Members do not realise that women's lives have improved. It is incredible to suggest to my generation that we are not aware of that. I am deeply aware that I am part of the luckiest generation ever to grow up in Britain. I thought that the generations who came after me would do even better, but that has not happened as yet, and it will not happen until we get a Labour Government.

I am a product of the post-war settlement. I am a product of that proud Labour Government who dealt with the previous terrible recession, and who brought in a comprehensive welfare state, full employment and expanding educational opportunities. I had all that. I am part of the first generation of my family to have had a university education. I have always been employed, and I have worked in a whole series of senior positions. I have always had the same pay as men, and I have always been at least equal to my male colleagues. I realise how lucky I am, and I am massively grateful for the opportunities which were given to me by that fine Labour Government.

We now have a Government who have ripped up those opportunities for current generations. I appreciate—unlike the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland)—that not all women in my country are as lucky as me. I see it as a part of my duty in politics to make life more just for everyone, and not just to be happy that I am okay whereas others can go and rot while working in low-paid jobs.

I am aware that there is an ever-growing number of women in Britain working in part-time and very low-paid employment. There is nothing wrong with part-time work. In the future, both men and women will work part time and will have careers in part-time work. They will

therefore be able to share the care of their children, and of their parents as they become older. We can then all be civilised, and be all the things we wish to be. We can care for our families, use our brains and abilities, operate in the economy and care for the people we love and are responsible for.

Mr. Nigel Evans *rose—*

Ms Short: I am sorry, but I am very short of time. If I get on with my speech, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The model to which we should aim will be the model which the next Labour Government will seek to bring about in Britain. We will create a more just, generous and comfortable quality of life for everybody.

The present Government have failed, in that they deliberately and positively encourage low pay. They have absolutely and deliberately stripped away all the protections which exist for low-paid workers, and they have deliberately created a lower national insurance threshold to encourage the trap in which 3 million low-paid workers find themselves. Those workers are not even earning enough for their national insurance entitlements.

Secondly, the Government provide the lowest quantity of publicly funded child care of any European Union country. The consequences of that are that half the women in Britain who care for their children—that has been their traditional role—have to work part time. Their work is therefore extremely badly paid. Part-time work in Britain is so organised at the moment that it goes with poor pay, no training, no access to promotion and no pension rights, and leads to poverty in old age. Half the women in Britain are trapped in such a position.

That is not good for British men, for whom employment has dropped massively during this failed economic experiment. Some 93 per cent. of men were in employment in 1971, while just 75 per cent. of men were in employment in 1992. Men have been squeezed out of the labour market because employers are using the cheapness of women to damage women and to push men out of the labour market.

Mr. Spring: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Short: I am sorry, but I have only three minutes left.

The Government's third failure is that their experiment leads to poor economic performance. Competition by wage-cutting leads to poor investment, poor training, a high labour turnover and, therefore, a poor performance in the British economy.

The Government's fourth failure is the massive benefit bill. There is the high cost of unemployment—by God we are paying a high cost in benefit expenditure—and also the high cost of subsidising the worst employers in the land who pay rotten wages on which people cannot live. Therefore, we have a £1 billion family credit bill, plus an additional £1 billion in housing costs. The Government's economic and labour market strategy is disastrous, and it is a part of the Government's ideological commitment to free market forces and inequality. It is damaging British women, British men and the performance of the British economy. It is a disaster.

The Labour Government will soon replace that failed economic experiment, and we will steer forward in the way which I have just described. We will produce a more comfortable society in which to live and a more efficient economy. The issue of where women sit in our society is a core issue. We must decide whether we wish to take our economy forward and modernise it to be successful, or whether we want to be held back—as the Government are doing.

Mr. Nigel Evans: The hon. Lady may be coming to the national minimum wage. I suspect that she will not give us the rate of that wage, but I would be delighted if she did so. Does the hon. Lady think that the deputy leader of the Labour party was wrong to say that any old fool knows that the national minimum wage would bring with it a "shake-out" in employment?

Ms Short: The national minimum wage, full-time rights for part-time workers, a national child care strategy—all those are part of the new economic settlement that I mentioned. One of the differences of morality, principle and economic understanding between the Opposition and the Government centres on the value of the national minimum wage. It is part of preventing employers from using women as cheap labour to push men out of the labour market, and using cheap labour instead of training and investment and thus holding back the British economy. We proudly put the national minimum wage at the centre of our economic strategy.

The Conservative party attacked us when we introduced the Equal Pay Act 1970, but Conservative Members are now boasting about how women have made some progress in their pay levels as a consequence of our Act. They said that we would put up women's wages and that women would be pushed out of the labour market and would lose jobs—that there would be massive unemployment among women. There was not, so they are wrong, as the international example and the example of our own history prove. They want to attack the minimum wage because they hate the idea that market forces will not be let rip and that lots of British workers will not be used as cheap labour by rotten employers. A Labour Government will not permit that.

12.50 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Today, we witnessed the second wasted opportunity in two days. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on her choice of subject, and that is about as far as my congratulations extend. For the rest, we have seen exactly what we saw yesterday—the massed ranks of the Opposition sisterhood, with a token man from time to time. Women speakers only and tokenism personified—that is what we have witnessed in the past two days.

What do the Opposition do? Do they welcome the great improvements in the way in which women live their lives? Do they welcome the great improvements for women in the labour market and in education? No, they whinge and whine, and moan and groan. Every time that a single good fact for women is produced, they look as glum as owls. The truth is that they want bad statistics, proof of suffering and low pay so that they can say, "Look, it's all the Government's fault." They will not welcome one good fact.

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

I am going to give them some good facts. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) said, "Hear the research." I am going to let the Opposition hear the research as well. First, we will start with the good facts. Since 1979, which, in case the Opposition missed it, was the year we came to power, women's pay—hourly, weekly, full-time and part-time—has increased faster than that of men. There are 1.5 million more women at work than 10 years ago, which is a 16 per cent. increase. That is the product of a Conservative Government.

The Opposition whinge about child care, by which they mean publicly funded child care. They discount all the rest, because if one is not spending public money, one is not doing anything according to their policy. Yet the greatest increase in the work force has been among women with children under five—from 27 per cent. in 1984 to 46 per cent. in 1993. That has been done under a Conservative Government.

There has been a rise of nearly 80 per cent. in the number of self-employed women since the Conservative party came to office. Of course there has been, because we are the party of the self-employed and of the women self-employed. All that has been done under a Conservative Government.

In the decade 1984 to 1994, the proportion of women in management and professional occupations increased from 25 per cent to 30 per cent., but the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), in what was otherwise a fairly thoughtful speech, criticised the lack of women at managerial level. He picked on training and enterprise councils and said—

Mr. Chidgey: That was the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), in an intervention in my speech.

Miss Widdecombe: I am sorry—the Opposition picked on TECs and it was said that there were too few women on their boards. Another fact is that there are 12 women chief executives of TECs, but only four women general secretaries of trade unions.

During the 1980s, women moved into new occupations. The number of women lawyers trebled, and they now account for one third of the profession; the number of women accountants doubled, and they now make up one quarter of chartered accountants; and nearly 30 per cent. of doctors are women. Those are achievements from which our country will receive lasting benefit and of which we can be proud.

In comparison with other European countries, we have done remarkably well. The United Kingdom has the second highest female participation rate in the European Union and that has been achieved by a Conservative Government with a flexible labour market. There are more women in employment in the United Kingdom than in any other EU country, except Germany. Only the UK, among the EU countries, has a lower unemployment rate for women than for men.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: No, I shall do exactly as the hon. Member for Ladywood did and allow the last two minutes for interventions, so that we can get some of these important facts on the record.

Those are the facts. Now for the research. According to the hon. Member for Ladywood, we do not hear about that. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development studies acknowledge that statutory minimum wages have an adverse effect on employment prospects, especially among the young and in low-productivity regions. How about the International Monetary Fund's "World Economic Report", which called on the industrial nations, especially those in Europe, to lower their minimum wages and to institute a wide range of other policies to make labour markets more flexible.

We have heard a lot about what is going on in the United States and how the minimum wage there has led to increased employment. Let us have the facts on the minimum wage in the United States—the way in which the hon. Member for Cambridge analysed the workings of the minimum wage there did not do justice to the name of Cambridge.

The federal minimum wage has fallen from more than 50 per cent. of the average wage in the late 1960s to 36 per cent. in the late 1980s. The freezing of the nominal wage in the 1980s led to a dramatic fall in its relative value, so the national minimum wage that the hon. Lady trumpets as an example is now at a 20-year low. We all know that President Clinton came into office promising that he would uprate the national minimum wage, but he found that he could not do so because, as his Labour Secretary said, of its adverse impact on jobs.

May we also have the answer that the hon. Member for Ladywood—the hon. Member for Cambridge can relax on this occasion—did not give, when we asked her about the deputy Leader of the Opposition and his clear admission that a national minimum wage would result in shake-outs? What will be shaken is people and what they will be out of is jobs. Many of them will be women. That is what the Opposition are promising women.

Dr. Lynne Jones *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall give way in the last two minutes only.

We have heard much spurious analysis about low pay today. The low pay network's attempts to show that pay has fallen since the final abolition of the wages councils in 1993 are a complete failure and are based on flawed surveys that study unfilled job centre vacancies, not the pay that workers get. It is not surprising that unfilled vacancies offer significantly lower pay than people really earn, because the higher-paying jobs are filled more quickly and are therefore under-represented in such surveys. It would be the economics of the kindergarten not to be able to work that out.

We have also heard the usual adverse comments about part-time workers, but 87 per cent. of those who work part time do not want a full-time job. I have, of all things, the Trades Union Congress on my side—I do not usually quote the TUC, but I am delighted to have this opportunity—which has carried out a survey that says that part-timers are more than twice as happy with their jobs as full-timers. That is not very surprising, is it?

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) and for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on their pertinent interventions. I am delighted that, on the Conservative side, men took part in this debate, because women's rights, and pay and equality for women, concern all society and not just

women. That is why the restriction of speeches to women on the Opposition Benches yesterday was one of the most shameful aspects of the debate—as if only women should be concerned about that.

The Labour party boasts that it is the only party concerned to have such debates, but, since 1979, it has initiated only two debates on the subject. Labour Members should not castigate us when, at the last moment and as a token gesture, they have suddenly realised that they can do something by instituting Supply day debates on the subject. Are we to understand that, from 1979 until last year, they did not think that the subject was important because they had no Supply day debates on it?

Dr. Lynne Jones: When the Minister has a chance to look at the *Hansard* record of yesterday's debate, I hope that she will withdraw those remarks, because a number of men participated early in the debate. What she said was therefore completely untrue and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It is now time for the next debate.

Mature A-level Students

1 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I am grateful to have an opportunity to raise a problem that occurs in the funding of higher education. The problem occurs with the system not of mandatory but of discretionary grants. Even with mandatory grants, which are basically those for which people apply when they want to take a degree course, everyone can think of ways in which the system could be improved. I certainly would not come here today to say that the mandatory grant system is perfect, but essentially it works. What has become increasingly obvious in recent years is that the discretionary grant system simply does not work.

For the most part, discretionary grants are given to people for further education but not necessary for a university degree. The effect is that they are given a grant under section 2 of the Education Act 1962, and it is entirely at the discretion of the local education authority whether a person is given a grant. One way or another, that system must be brought to an end.

The problem has become more obvious in recent years, because people now do more than one job in a lifetime and are encouraged to return to education and training. The difficulty is that, when they do that, they cannot demand a grant as of right but must apply for that grant, and whether they get it lies entirely at the whim of the local education authority.

Today I shall mention just two areas where that system can cause real injustice and bring about a state of affairs that nobody on either side of the House would want. Other examples exist, but I shall deal simply with the problems that affect, first, those doing A-levels and, secondly, those doing dance or speech and drama courses.

If someone takes A-levels at a time when most people do—at school—the system works, and no great problem arises. Students are at home being looked after by their parents, so their subsistence is taken care of and the school pays the fees.

The problem arises for people who do not take A-levels in that way. They may have failed them at school and then gone out to work; perhaps they did not go to a good school, or left school early with no intention of taking A-levels. Subsequently, however, a variety of people without A-levels decide, for whatever reason, that they want to go to university. At that stage, they realise that they must get some A-levels in order to do so.

I have now discovered, through numerous cases that have been drawn to my attention at my constituency surgeries, that people then follow a well-worn course of action. Such people are usually quite committed, have identified the university that they wish to attend and know which course they want to do. Having established that, they want to take their A-levels.

People with that amount of get up and go will usually have gone to a local college and satisfied themselves that it can take them on and provide the A-level courses they want. Then the problems start, because, when they apply to the local education authority, they invariably find—it happens increasingly in Devon—that they will not get the support they need.

Obviously, it would be easier to give a knee-jerk reaction and say that people should work their way through college, as that is how it used to be done. That is

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

easy to say, but it does not answer the case. Usually, people who do A-levels in that way do them intensively—perhaps three A-levels in one year.

The idea that one should be able to do such a concentrated course and work sufficiently to provide accommodation, food and sustenance and pay for college fees is too much to expect. There may be one or two exceptionally brave individuals out there, but I did not have to get my education in that way, and I doubt whether many other hon. Members did. I pay credit to those who can cope, but many cannot. Why should we expect more of our constituents than was demanded of us?

The problem for many people at that stage is that, although they have shown commitment by working out what they want to do, which university they wish to attend and which college can take them on, they are suddenly hard up against the problem of receiving no grant. If all else fails, they must simply drop out if they cannot raise the money for their fees or maintenance, and their hopes are blighted.

In practice, it means at the very least that people will not fulfil their potential. In reality, it means that people who could have passed A-levels and gone on to get a degree, which does not guarantee them a job but gives them a better chance of a getting a fulfilling job and contributing back into the tax system, have to drop out. Everybody then loses.

Alternatively, some people live dangerously within the "21-hour rule", as it was until recently. There is no doubt that some local DSS officials take a relatively broad and academic view of those matters, but we cannot base a further education system on local officials turning a blind eye. If a full-time A-level student maintains himself on social security benefits, ultimately he is skirting close to breaking the criminal law, and we do not want that to happen.

The third option is that potential students—in a sense, this is how I come into the debate—may take the matter to their local Member of Parliament

Over the years, I have developed a format for dealing with the problem. I have identified 10 or 12 charities that are prepared to consider a case put up by an A-level student. I provide a list of those charities and tell people, based on experience, which charities are more likely to offer a grant. It is a sticking plaster operation, and I hesitate to mention it on the Floor of the House lest I suddenly receive applications from not one constituency but 650. I am not in a position to give that list to anyone but my constituents. In any case, it is not a satisfactory way to deal with the problem.

I make no apology for dealing with the problem as a constituency Member of Parliament, but the problem goes far wider than my constituency. It is well summed up by the principal of the excellent South Devon college, Dr. Keen. I shall quote just one paragraph from his long letter, which sets out far better than I can the essence of the dilemma:

"I am pleased to be able to provide some of the information which came to light in our discussion earlier today . . . The following information is drawn from Devon County Council's Citizens Charter indicators for 1993/94, and you will be interested to note that they issued 1,075 discretionary awards, representing 65.02 per cent. of applicants. What was not mentioned in that report is that discretionary awards were provided for subsistence only, no fees were met. We have evidence at South Devon of over 400 adult applicants for mainstream full-time further education courses, including A-levels, where the failure on the part of the local authority to provide a discretionary award has prevented the individuals concerned from attending. As a College we have reacted to this concern by waiving 100 per cent. of the fee element of such courses for all applicants who are eligible for a discretionary award but for whom no award has been given."

Dr. Keen goes on to explain:

"This contribution on our part has had adverse effects on cash flow, as we have had to survive on the units of funding derived from the Further Education Funding Council which, without a fee element, are below cost levels. Nevertheless, of 400+ applicants only 203 were able to accept under these terms. The other group (in excess of 200) had received neither discretionary award for fees or subsistence and remained unable to follow any study at the College at all."

That shows, in a crisp way, the dilemma that faces students of that sort.

I said a few moments ago that it is not only those who are studying for A-levels in their maturer years who fall into that category. What about those people who want to do speech and drama? Anyone who has any personal acquaintance of the dedication of a student who expects to be able to make a living in fields such as that will realise that they do not offer themselves lightly for such an award.

I quote from a letter that I received from the Royal Academy of Dancing, south-west region, on February 23 1995. A Miss Walker writes:

"As I am sure you are aware discretionary grants for dance and drama students have been abolished by Devon County Council.

This will obviously mean that our most talented youngsters in the region will be unable to take up their places at Vocational colleges, from where many of them would go on to perform in the West End or in ballet companies world-wide. Eventually, it could lead"—

I would say, would lead—

"to the smaller local dance schools in the South West closing if there is nothing for our students to work towards . . .

We must not let our talented dance students lose out".

Those people show a high degree of commitment and dedication even to have got themselves that far, and everything collapses when they cannot obtain funding.

What is the answer? My hon. Friend the Minister, with his usual generosity, will admit that I have not tried to take him unaware. I have pestered him with specific constituency problems during his entire time as Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education. I guarantee to continue to pester him and any successors, and I have also supplied the notes for my speech today and the material on which I draw.

I hope that my hon. Friend finds that helpful, because otherwise he will be reduced to saying, "What the hon. Gentleman says is very interesting; I shall pause and reflect on it." I hope that my hon. Friend feels that I have been extremely helpful in providing him with the information in advance, so that he can say something to us about it.

Obviously, it would not be the answer—I do not think that my hon. Friend the Minister would even try to do it—to say, "The answer is that we have already done a great deal." Indeed we have. An all-time record number of people attends further education, and we can derive satisfaction from that, but it does not solve the specific problem. It is only a temporary answer to say that the social security system should be altered so that people can live on social security while undertaking education

courses. In all conscience, the social security mechanism does not exist to underpin the education system; it is there for an entirely different reason.

In no sense is the position the Government's fault, but in a sense it is the Government's problem, because ultimately only the Government can solve it. What is the answer?

I have always held the opinion, on the Back Benches and at the Dispatch Box, that it is a Back-Bencher's job to come up with problems, not solutions. It would be unfair if my hon. Friend the Minister, with his considerable expertise and the serried ranks of experts behind him, were to pick off any solution that I might offer and say, "That one will not work." The problem needs to be brought to the House, so that my hon. Friend can respond to it. Having said that, I acknowledge that old habits die hard. Perhaps I may suggest two ideas that occur to me that would solve the problem.

The first way in which the problem might be solved would be to make, in addition to a mandatory grant for a degree course, a mandatory grant for a course immediately preparatory to a degree course. That would mean that, if one took a bona fide A-level course—safeguards might be built in to ensure that it was bona fide—one could obtain a compulsory grant for so doing. That is one possibility. However, it would not encompass speech and drama students.

Therefore, a second solution might commend itself to my hon. Friend—to take away that part of the rate support grant that goes to a local education authority and give it to the Further Education Funding Council, so that the funding council can disperse it, and do so 100 per cent.

Dr. Keen draws attention to the reason why that would be a good idea. Dr. Keen sounds a caveat, and I have not been able to check that it is correct, but I guess that it is. He says:

> "Although I am unable to provide specific sources at the moment, I am led to believe that that element of the Rate Support Grant which should reasonably be expected to be spent on discretionary awards in Devon is in the order of £7M, and yet I am told that in the present year the actual expenditure is likely to be in the order of £3M".

It would appear, therefore, that, at the very least, the moneys that might be said to be available are not being spent 100 per cent.

It is obvious—and obvious if one considers the antics of the Devon local education authority in recent days—that decisions of that type are too crucial to be left to the whims of local education authorities. If we are to respond to changes in educational patterns and life patterns; if we are to accept and adjust to the fact that people live longer, stay younger longer, stay healthier longer and move from job to job in a way in which in our parents' and grandparents' generation would have thought impossible, we must say that the group of students that I have mentioned can no longer depend on the whims of a—perhaps even maverick—local authority.

The number of potential students affected may not be great. I do not have the resources to ascertain the number, but I do know that, even in one rural constituency, a steady trickle of people find themselves in that position. Ultimately, if I cannot help, or others cannot help, there will be blighted expectations and blighted lives.

I should like to think that my hon. Friend the Minister will at least be able to say, even if he cannot approve any solution and even if he does not know the answer off the top of his head, that nevertheless there is a problem. If we establish that, we shall be halfway to solving it.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on his success in obtaining this Adjournment debate, and for using it to bring the important issue of education for mature advanced level students to the attention of the House. He has done that clearly and eloquently.

He has, as he has said himself, done it on the back of a continuing correspondence, and having expressed concern to me repeatedly. I hope that, in turn, he will understand that I cannot give him any instant solutions today, but I have listened carefully, especially to the specific arguments that he has articulated as part of a more general picture. I shall return to those later.

I emphasise that the general system of adult student support that we have stands comparison with that in any other major comparable industrialised country. On the mandatory award side, when student loans were introduced five years ago, the total resources available to students in grants and loans were increased by 25 per cent., and they have increased each year since then, in line with forecast inflation. Those current arrangements in higher education are most generous, and, unlike the situation in many of our competitor countries, the great majority of our students pay nothing towards their fees.

I shall return to the subject of discretionary award provision later, but first I should like to say something about the increasing importance of learning throughout life, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and what the Government are doing to encourage it.

We are committed to encouraging all types of adult learning to increase participation in education by adults, and to improve levels of attainment. The evidence is that increasing numbers of people are returning to education. In the past 10 years, there has been an increase of about a quarter in further education enrolments by adults in England and Wales.

More recently, the rapid expansion of the further education sector, since its establishment in 1993, has enabled more adults to undertake the type of formal qualification-bearing courses for which the further education funding councils are now responsible. Indeed, adults now make up the majority of those in the further education sector, and we have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of mature entrants in higher education.

The national targets for education and training provide a commitment and a focus for all of us—employers, unions, educationists, trainers and Government—by highlighting what we need to do to compete with our international rivals. The targets envisage our becoming a skilled nation, and that requires raising the levels of attainment of young people and adults alike.

The lifetime learning targets set challenging goals for individuals and employers to improve skill levels to world class standards. That requires fostering a culture of lifetime learning, and that is reflected in those national

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

targets. We all need to work together to achieve the better educated, more highly skilled, nation that we all require in future.

The Government will continue to play their proper part, principally by funding the further education sector. The plans announced in the most recent Budget will support a 25 per cent. increase in FE student numbers in the period 1993-94 to 1996-97. A further 3 per cent. increase in student numbers is planned for 1997-98.

The increase in funding in 1995-96 will be 4 per cent, and adult students will be among those to benefit. The system that we have established, with colleges having control over their own affairs, enables colleges to respond to the needs of their own local communities in the best way possible. The funding council has assisted that process by introducing a funding system that looks at the guidance students get and the outcomes they achieve, not just at student enrolments. Colleges have the incentive to give students the qualifications that suit them best.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge referred to the difficulties that students in Devon and in his constituency are experiencing in obtaining discretionary awards to finance their studies. As my hon. Friend is aware, discretionary awards are, by definition, an area where individual local education authorities may exercise their discretion. It is for them to decide how many awards to make, to which students and at what rates, depending on their view of local needs and priorities. Under the present arrangements, the Secretary of State has no power to intervene unless there is evidence that an authority is acting unlawfully—for example, by operating a policy of "no awards, come what may".

The evidence suggests that, overall, the number of awards made to further education students is holding up. In 1992-93—the latest year for which figures are available—there was an increase of 12 per cent. in the number of FE awards made by local authorities in England and Wales. In the same year, those authorities spent almost £170 million on such awards.

Enrolments in further education sector colleges rose by 5 per cent. between 1992-93 and 1993-94. The strategic plans of colleges indicate that the number of full-time enrolments are expected to rise by 23 per cent. between 1993-94 and 1996-97; and part-time enrolments are expected to rise by 20 per cent in that period.

I am aware, however, that there are wide differences between LEA policies and practices in this area. Where the differences reflect more than the normal variations resulting from decisions about local needs and priorities, and where they amount to some authorities effectively throwing in the towel on discretionary awards, that is of course a matter for concern, locally and nationally. I know that the local authority associations—I met them again last week—are drawing up some voluntary guidelines which should help to address the situation as to both process and substance. That is a very welcome development. The Government are also keeping the situation under review.

My hon. Friend suggested that Devon county was spending only £3 million a year on discretionary awards, against an "expected" total of £7 million. We need to be clear that Devon county council, like every other local authority, is responsible for setting its own budget and deciding its priorities between and within services. The council has the final say on how much it spends on education and how much is spent on other services.

The role of central Government is to set the overall framework for the funding of local authority services nationally and to determine the way in which national "standard spending" totals are distributed between local authorities through the standard spending assessment system, with which my hon. Friend will be familiar.

The 1995-96 local authority grant settlement is a tough one, but it allows LEAs in England to spend £17.204 billion on education—an increase of 1.1 per cent. over the comparable figure for 1994-95, which reflects the priority that we have given to education, among other local services, in the settlement.

Having received its individual education SSA, it is for Devon to set its own budget and to decide what to spend on particular areas of the service, including discretionary awards. The SSAs are not prescriptive, and decisions about how much to spend on education and where to spend it are matters of local discretion. The county council is responsible to its electors. It will assess its own priorities in the light of local circumstances, and take the appropriate action.

After adjustment for recoupment—which covers the net costs of 'imported' or 'exported' pupils—Devon's SSA for 1995-96 was almost £7 million greater than that for 1994-95. That represents an increase of 2.1 per cent. However, it is entirely for the authority to decide what level of budget to set, and how to spend it.

My hon. Friend also suggested a possible general solution to the problems that he identified: that discretionary award funding should be transferred to the FEFC and then passed to colleges which would make their own awards. That is an interesting suggestion, and I certainly do not wish to discourage a debate of its merits, but I should perhaps point out that it would not be as straightforward as my hon. Friend suggests.

For example, how would one deal with those colleges which are not supported by the funding council—including many of the dance and drama colleges which my hon. Friend mentioned and to which I shall return in a moment? Would it make sense for local authorities to retain responsibility for higher education but not for further education awards? On what basis would the funding council decide how to distribute the available money between colleges? Are all colleges well placed to take on the role of making grants to students, and would they wish to do so?

Of course, a transfer of funds of that sort would not of itself increase the overall amount of money available, and there would be losers as well as winners if funds were reallocated. I should also point out that primary legislation would be needed if we were not to leave local authorities with a legal obligation to consider all applications for awards, but no provision with which actually to make them.

Returning briefly to the subject of dance and drama students which my hon. Friend mentioned, I am aware that in many areas of the country that group faces particular difficulties in obtaining discretionary awards. Their courses, which are largely provided in the private sector, are relatively expensive to support and many LEAs are becoming increasingly unwilling to do that. My hon. Friend is correct to say that. I assure my hon. Friend that

the Government are concerned about the implications of that situation, both for individual students and for the future of the dance and drama industries.

My right hon. Friend had a very useful meeting with the chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain last autumn to discuss the matter. Since then, our officials have been discussing the issues with officials of the Department of National Heritage and the Arts Council. However, I make it clear that, in the current public expenditure climate, there is no prospect of any significant extension of eligibility for mandatory awards to cover students on those courses.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the so-called 21-hour rule. The Government wish to continue to encourage people of all ages to improve their qualifications for productive employment. They have given intensive consideration to how that aim may be supported in setting out the new arrangements under the job seeker's allowance. Our aim was to establish clear and objective new rules which could be easily administered and understood.

From April 1996, the new arrangements will allow people to study for up to 16 guided learning hours. They do not cut eligibility to study from 21 hours; the basis for calculation is different. The new threshold will maintain broadly the same numbers of people who are able to study at present while in receipt of benefit, and it broadly equates to part-time study under the present rules. Individuals can—and should—study privately in addition for as long as they like and still remain eligible for benefit so long as they are available for work. I think that the new arrangements will be clearer, more consistent and more certain for student applicants.

The benefit of Adjournment debates is that it enables hon. Members to offer local perspectives on issues, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for doing that today. There are many educational opportunities in the south Devon area. I know that many people who are involved in education and training in Devon will want to play their part in increasing participation and attainment in adult education. I am grateful for the figures that my hon. Friend supplied about the number of applicants.

There are a number of excellent colleges in south Devon, and if their growth rates are anything to go by—I know that anything up to 14 per cent. a year has been planned—they serve the local population well. I know that the achievement of one of the colleges in a nearby constituency has been recognised by the award of a charter mark. I take this opportunity to congratulate South Devon college and Dr. Keen on that award. It serves as an example of what can be, and is being, achieved.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for expressing his concerns so eloquently. I share his hope that, in the years to come, as a result of our provisions, the educational institutions in Devon—schools, colleges and universities—will continue to go from strength to strength, and to merit many more accolades.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Safety)

1.29 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The loss of a dear one in the family or a very good friend is a trauma from which people seldom recover. When that real sense of grief is overlain with deep anger at the feeling that the death may have been avoidable, the pressure is so great that it needs to be expressed, and in this case it is being expressed in the House of Commons.

In the past several years, there has been clear evidence that, because of defects in the way in which they are run, HGVs and large vehicles are increasingly contributing to terrible deaths and even worse injuries. In the frightful case at Sowerby Bridge, where six people lost their lives, not only did it take a considerable time for the case to be considered by the relevant authorities but the maximum fine for the death of six people was £5,000. The effect was to bring together a small group of relatives who have suffered that frightful trauma to alert the House of Commons to a serious and current problem.

The Government rely heavily on the fact that accident statistics are decreasing, but within those numbers it is clear that the problems involving HGVs are not only real but need to be addressed urgently. The Government have behaved with enormous and frightening complacency, despite various campaigns. I make an honourable mention of the one run by the *Yorkshire Post*, which highlighted some of the terrible things that have happened. The present Minister has told us that we should put pressure on the Home Office and the other agencies concerned to understand the problems.

Let us examine what the Government have done. They have announced a 20 per cent. cut across the board in the Vehicle Inspectorate. It has already been reduced by 15 per cent. since 1991. There has been pressure on the traffic police, who have responsibility for multi-agency stops and are directly responsible for many of the statistics that are of such great importance. For example, the West Mercia police gave me statistics for the total number of checks that they have carried out in a six-month period. There were 473 checks and 365 document requests, but the average mean defect rate was 91.18 per cent.

The police say, sensibly, that those statistics can vary in the type of defect that they reveal. However, vehicles that are capable of inflicting death and injury are travelling our roads. Hauliers are not just cutting costs; some are cutting corners. As one of the relatives told the Minister this week, when he was good enough to see a delegation, we should put life before livelihood.

In 1994, the Vehicle Inspectorate had 1,780 staff; by 1996 that number will be down to 1,268. The front-line enforcement staff will be reduced from 419 to 370. Therefore, we need the Government to produce a policy which is both urgent and immediate.

We must give the traffic commissioners stronger powers. They must have the right to deal with those unlicensed operators who are not part of the licensing system and who are not, therefore, subject to periodical checks. There is already a review of the traffic commissioners' work. I hope that, far from looking at a cost-cutting programme, they will be given increased powers and the ability to initiate work.

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

The Minister said, however, that he is satisfied that the Government do not necessarily seek undemanding roles in these matters. A recent memo to all traffic examiners highlighted the problem:

"As you are aware we are falling behind on some key targets in our activity budgets at this time, with your co-operation we should be able to meet them by changing our methods . . . Due partly to unrealistic targets using present methods partly to unreliable weighbridges, lack of police support and road works we are well behind on both weighing and vehicle inspections . . . It will be helpful if . . . you could approach private weighbridge operators such as those at Quarries, Factories Stock Holders and Agricultural Product Stores, and ask if you may observe weighing in and out. It is realised that no prosecutions will be generated . . . but prevention is supposed to be better than cure."

That is absolutely right, and it is time that the Government started to put that idea into operation with some vigour and commitment.

We must have more, not fewer, roadside checks; we must ask the police not to do away with their traffic divisions, but if necessary to increase the number of those who are capable of carrying out that detailed and highly specialised work. We must not use the report of KPMG Peat Marwick, which apparently will recommend that there should not be long and costly investigations, with major tachograph inquiries, without pointing out that, as a result of some of those inquiries, the directors of two companies have been gaoled and the transport manager of a third company has been given a suspended prison sentence. Those exemplary damages are not handed out without evidence that there is a need for them.

The Government should be seeking a way of developing corporate manslaughter charges. Where there is evidence of consistent neglect or the abuse of drivers' hours, we should know that someone will be prosecuted for that irresponsibility. The Government should introduce consigner liability so that companies that use transport firms have to take responsibility for ensuring that they are employing only reputable contractors.

The fines must be increased. It is bizarre that a £5,000 fine was considered adequate for Sowerby Bridge, yet a company director who was involved in hygiene problems in the catering industry could face a larger fine. The fine for illegal operation is £450, whereas an overload could attract a fine of £750. It is worth while to some cowboys to take a risk that leads to death and injury.

We must seriously consider abandoning the deregulation of the goods vehicle licensing system. Licences are renewed at five-yearly intervals, and I do not believe that the public will continue to accept a system of renewing licences which means that, unless there is a real body of evidence, neither local authorities nor individuals have the opportunity to object to a road haulier having his licence renewed. We must do something to increase enforcement at every level.

We should stop artificial targets for the Vehicle Inspectorate and ensure there is far better training. We should certainly ensure that computer links exist between the courts and the enforcement agencies. There is no reason why those who contravene the law of the land should be able to escape. Some cases avoid proper detection for many months because the statistics have been lost between the courts and traffic enforcement agencies, even if they eventually arrive on the right desk at the right time.

Company directors who know that they are running sub-standard vehicles and pushing their drivers well beyond the hours they should work should be punished. They will not be punished adequately by the courts unless the Government make clear their anger and their commitment to changing the way in which they are operating. The Magistrates Association will respond only if it is made clear that the House of Commons does not accept what is happening.

On several occasions, the Minister has asked my little voluntary organisation—consisting only of relatives of those who have been killed or injured in accidents involving heavy goods vehicles—to put enormous pressure on the Home Office. On Monday, he said that he would act when he saw evidence of illegal operations. Let me remind the Minister that, two years ago, his own Department set up an illegal operation working party under the traffic area co-ordinating division, which recommended the introduction of power to impound vehicles. The Government should be considering that now.

I feel so indignant about the matter that I could easily speak for longer than my allotted time. We are talking about people's lives, and the destruction of families and homes. The Minister will not be able to wave that aside with bland assurances; we want him to paint a clear picture of the measures that he personally intends to introduce.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Do I understand it that those who wish to speak have the agreement of both the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and the Minister?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Certainly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Have they the agreement of the Minister?

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, I call Mr. Tyler.

1.40 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I did not expect to be able to speak. No doubt the Minister will be glad to learn that I shall do so very briefly.

Let me emphasise two aspects of the speech of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). First, she expressed an all-party concern. She generously allowed me to join a deputation to the Minister earlier this week; we are grateful to him for meeting members of the campaign for safer lorries, also known by the shorter name of Brake.

Secondly, there is a feeling throughout the House that we should emphasise prevention rather than penalty. As the hon. Lady pointed out, effective penalties are an important deterrent, but prevention is more important. It is in that context that hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed anxiety about the apparent reduction in the manpower strength of those who are responsible for inspecting, monitoring and policing the current regulations.

When our deputation met the Minister on Monday, he ruled out the possibility of corporate manslaughter charges. That stance has never been explained to my satisfaction—or, I believe, to the satisfaction of other hon. Members—given that it was considered appropriate to bring such a charge against the owners and operators of the Herald of Free Enterprise. The two instances are exactly comparable: both involve loss of life, disaster and damage on a very large scale, as will be clear to those who add together all the human tragedies that have occurred as a result of heavy lorry operators' going well outside the law.

I am delighted to have been able to speak, albeit briefly. I am also delighted that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was able to raise the issue, and I hope for a positive and forward-looking response from the Minister.

1.42 pm

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I thank the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and my hon. Friend the Minister for allowing me to speak briefly. Without this opportunity, my comments would have been made in an intervention—for I know that, with their usual courtesy, the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend would have given way.

Sowerby Bridge is not in my constituency, but I represented Sowerby for a long time. It is a stone's throw from my present constituency—just a step over the border. The shock generated by the tragedy to which the hon. Lady referred cannot be exaggerated; I join her in congratulating the *Yorkshire Post* and the local paper, the *Courier*, on their restrained and sensible campaign. Long-established haulage firms in my constituency, such as Joe Dean, have asked me to convey their belief that safer lorries create better rather than worse business.

The hon. Lady made her points in her own way. I have only one point to add, which was not covered adequately earlier; I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will pick up further points in his reply. I believe that there should be more mobility in regard to traffic inspection points. Cowboys tend to divert their lorries from the fixed points that are often provided because they know where they are likely to be inspected, and that cannot be good. I have written in the past about this matter to the Minister, but I feel that I should mention it again.

1.44 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I shall speak briefly to allow my hon. Friend the Minister to respond in detail, but I wish to highlight issues raised by the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler).

Growing concern about lorries that do not meet the safety requirements that we rightly demand is bad news for those who operate within the law. Protection should be provided not only for lorry drivers but for the innocent travelling public who are sometimes involved in horrendous accidents. I have written to my hon. Friend the Minister about the accident that took place on Cromford hill in my constituency last year; another bad accident involving the mother of my constituent Mrs. Williams, also in my constituency, probably led to the formation of the Brake campaign. I pay tribute to the way in which Mrs. Williams has put so much work into bringing the issue to the fore.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure us about the number of inspections that will be carried out. It is vital for the whole road haulage industry to understand that the Government are serious about enforcement. Although we must look for efficiency gains in management costs, we must not be diverted from the need to enforce the law as it stands.

1.45 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I am grateful for the opportunity to assure the House that the Government remain fully committed to raising the safety standards of vehicles.

I acknowledge immediately that what the hon. Lady said is supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am delighted that my hon. Friends the Members for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) and for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) were able to speak; I am well aware of their interests in the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley has taken a particular interest in it since the tragedy in Sowerby, and my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire—a former Transport Minister—has long been concerned about it.

Earlier this week, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) came to see me with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich. We held a useful meeting with the organisers of the lorry safety campaign Brake. The hon. Lady chose to quote what was said then; she has her recollections of the occasion and I have mine, and no doubt any significant differences in our recollections will become clear. Suffice it to say that I believe we should spell out the measures that we ought to take, how they should be developed, what is practical and what is not, the reaction that is, no doubt, understandable on occasions but may be less practicable when implemented on the ground, and how we intend to build on our good record.

We have a good record. We are introducing measures to achieve further improvements, with the objective of making our roads safer. I pay tribute to staff at all levels in the Vehicle Inspectorate—a highly trained body of men and women who are fully committed to keeping our roads safe and working closely with the police and trading standards departments of local authorities throughout the country.

The Government certainly share the objectives of the Brake campaigners. One of those many objectives is to ensure that lorries are properly controlled and adequately maintained. Enforcement measures should be in place to ensure that, and transgressors should be suitably dealt with.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said, we are satisfied that an enforcement regime is in place and that it ensures that the vast majority of lorry operators are operating legally, within the requirements of the operator licensing system. That system sets very high standards: many believe that they are the highest in Europe. Despite that, we are constantly seeking improved ways of targeting enforcement against operators who run outside the system.

We must remember that operators are responsible for maintaining their vehicles in a safe and roadworthy condition. No Government can ever stand over all operators all the time. My hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Steve Norris]

West Derbyshire was quite right to say that the majority of lorry operators try to operate legally and that they deeply resent those who do not. Enforcement is being directed effectively to ensure that transgressors are suitably dealt with.

The enforcement system underpins the individual responsibilities of vehicle operators, with three complementary forms of control. It is important that we recognise each of those components in our control system. The operator licensing system is administered by the licensing authorities. They are independent traffic commissioners, appointed by the Secretary of State and supported by the staff of the eight traffic area offices.

With very few exceptions, hauliers wishing to operate in road haulage must apply to enter the operating licensing system; entry is conditional on having adequate maintenance arrangements, not just when a licence is sought but throughout its life, to ensure that vehicles are maintained and kept mechanically sound. We have produced, in partnership with the industry trade associations, the "Guide for Maintaining Roadworthiness", which sets down the standards that operators are expected to reach in operating their vehicles. The guide has the strong support of the traffic commissioners.

An operator's performance in running his or her fleet is kept under review and can be called into question by the licensing review boards of the traffic area offices, which monitor operators' performance and bring together all the relevant data. Those licensing review boards can consider whether to recommend disciplinary action against those who fail to match the formal declaration that they made to the traffic commissioner when they applied for a licence to operate in road haulage. A computerised database has been developed to support those licensing review boards, and the number of cases considered increased from 2,175 in 1991-92 to 3,291 in 1993-94, as the system became more effective.

The Vehicle Inspectorate directly supports the operator licensing system and the traffic commissioners through its work on enforcement and in carrying out maintenance investigations and appraisals. This year, the Vehicle Inspectorate plans to carry out 15,109 in-depth investigations, which are usually directed at new operators, with around 32,000 appraisals.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was quite wrong when she asserted that, under the arrangements now in statute under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, there would be any relaxation of the supervision of operators. She is factually wrong. The reality, of course, as she would know had she listened to the debate, is that operators' licences, in every case, will be examined every five years, as now.

On deregulation related to the advertising arrangements for operators, no one has complained on any basis whatever. There are, in fact, better arrangements for representations from members of the public on operators' licences. As the hon. Lady should know, there is an advertisement that offers interested parties a narrow window during which they must post their concerns about the operator's licence. Late representations are routinely ruled out, much to the irritation of those who wish to have them taken into account. It is quite right that we should have the arrangement, which we have developed, to allow people to make representations at any time during the five years and still have those representations taken into account.

Almost all heavy goods vehicles are subject to annual roadworthiness tests by the Vehicle Inspectorate. A certificate is issued if a vehicle is shown to meet safety and emissions standards required to pass that test. In 1993-94, the Vehicle Inspectorate carried out annual tests of about 448,000 heavy goods vehicles, of which about 127,000 had to be retested, and about 224,000 trailers, of which 43,000 had to be retested.

As well as roadworthiness tests and the operator licensing arrangements, checks are made at the roadside to ensure that UK lorries are operated safely and within the law. Checks are also made on foreign vehicles using our roads. This year, the Vehicle Inspectorate plans to carry out about 120,000 roadworthiness checks on lorries and trailers, including more than 5,000 foreign vehicles. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley that those spot checks are a powerful deterrent, as an immediate prohibition is issued for vehicles found to have significant defects, and that ban is not lifted until the inspectorate is satisfied that the defect has been remedied.

Prohibitions were issued on 16 per cent. of vehicles checked in that way in 1993-94. My hon. Friend is quite right to say that there should be an element of surprise in the way in which the checks are carried out, so that operators do not simply seek to avoid the areas where they think that the checks will take place.

In addition to roadworthiness checks on lorries, the Vehicle Inspectorate also checks that other requirements are being met, including correct documentation, overloading, drivers' hours, tachographs, vehicle lighting, tyres and placarding of hazardous loads, all of which can have a direct effect on the safe operation of lorries. The Vehicle Inspectorate aims to carry out those checks on some 306,000 lorries in 1994-95. In 1993-94, checks of that nature resulted in some 15,000 prosecutions. It is the Government's intention that lorry standards should be maintained and that enforcement should be directed against those who operate outside the law, or fail to maintain their vehicles and meet the requirements of the operator licensing system.

Much has been made—indeed, the hon. Lady referred to it—of the Department's 20 per cent. efficiency gains initiative. I want to assure the House, not for the first time, that we are quite clear that the level of enforcement by the Vehicle Inspectorate is being maintained. The efficiency gains that the Vehicle Inspectorate is achieving arise from a variety of measures, including reductions in middle management, rationalisation of the organisation, reduced accommodation costs, an increased use of information technology and improved productivity of inspectorate staff at all levels.

The Vehicle Inspectorate expects to achieve the targets set without any reduction in its effectiveness as a road safety agency or in the level of enforcement that it provides. The effectiveness of that work and the position on resources and staffing for enforcement are kept constantly under review. Each year, the Department agrees with the inspectorate a balance of enforcement work to match the enforcement requirements of the Department and the traffic commissioners.

Enforcement is directed against a broad range of requirements and the mix of enforcement activity is kept under review, and redirected where considered necessary, to address any new priorities.

For example, more enforcement effort has been directed to drivers' hours, and tachograph investigations have been carried out by a Vehicle Inspectorate task force to address the particular concerns of the traffic commissioners, because, of course, tiredness among drivers is a lethal cause of accidents. It is entirely right that, if one is looking to operate a safe regime, one should direct substantial effort at tachograph investigations. Interestingly, we carry out about twice as many such investigations as other European countries. Our record on that is second to none.

We are also looking at the problem of illegal operators. A small minority chooses to operate illegally outside the system and enforcement is being targeted against them. It is true that the scale of illegal operations is difficult to estimate, and we are currently examining how a more precise quantification of the size of the problem can be obtained.

Contrary to what the hon. Lady asserts, I have not asked Brake to produce that evidence, or in any sense challenged it or relied on it to do that. I merely suggested that, if it had any information on that score, I would be more than happy to receive it, because it is important that the organisation should not feel that it is being told that it must rely solely on the statistics gathered by the Department. When one is in the area of illegal operations, by definition one must be prepared to take a fairly wide view on where the information comes from.

We want to take action against illegal operators on two broad fronts: first, by building up information to identify who they are; and, secondly, by targeting the locations where we know they may be. We recognise our own responsibilities as a major contractor of civil engineering work in that respect. Discussions are still taking place on the detail, and I am grateful to the Federation of Civil Engineers and Contractors, which responded positively to the introduction of checks by main contractors on the licence status of vehicles delivering to and from the Department's own construction sites, for providing facilities for checks and displaying signs warning drivers that checks will be carried out. I know that the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office have taken similar initiatives.

The objective, of course, is to prosecute the illegal operator in court, where, I hope, a suitably heavy fine will be awarded. Another objective is to persuade the illegal operator to apply for a licence and enter the licensing system. Once in the system, the performance and subsequent transgressions that result in prosecutions can be taken into account by the traffic commissioner when considering disciplinary action against a licence holder or a driver. I am satisfied that the traffic commissioners are mindful of the need to perform their statutory duties for operator and driver discipline with due regard to ensure that the procedures are properly followed and that appropriate disciplinary action is taken where justified.

Enforcement needs to be supported by data sharing. Some computer systems are already in place and others are being developed to support the enforcement and roadworthiness work of the Vehicle Inspectorate and the operator licensing function of the traffic area offices.

I want to say a few words to the hon. Member for North Cornwall about the concept of corporate manslaughter. I must make it clear to him that it is not directly my policy area in terms of constructing the criminal law. As he rightly said, I told the campaigners that there are already a whole range of remedies, including legislation on manslaughter, for such cases. I entirely take his point about the existence of the concept of corporate manslaughter and its applicability in other circumstances.

Although I do not want to rule out the prospect of other offences being created on the statute book, I reiterate that there is already a panoply of offences. From his experience, the hon. Gentleman will understand that the diffidence of the courts is often at issue. They are diffident about bringing charges in such difficult areas. I am satisfied that our effective and valuable enforcement system plays a vital part—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Time is up.

Homelessness

2 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): As many hon. Members are aware, the country's main national homelessness charity, Shelter, recently organised a promotional event, Shelter Week, through which it sought to boost awareness of its work and to encourage support and involvement by our constituents. I was asked to record a taped message of support for the promotional campaign and I was delighted to do what I could in a limited way to assist. As a result of that involvement, I decided to seek an opportunity to put on record a number of important points of detail and of principle in an effort to assist in moving the issue of homelessness further up the public, political and parliamentary agenda.

My starting point is simple. In a well organised and affluent society such as ours, it is a tragedy in personal, social and economic terms that homelessness continues to be a major problem. I am anxious to do all that I can to encourage the establishment of a new consensus in finding practical solutions. The more I look at the situation, the more I am convinced that real and lasting solutions will be found only when the problem is tackled by a genuine partnership between national and local government, housing associations, charities, campaigning organisations and individuals.

It is against that background that we need, first, to appreciate the sheer scale of the problem, which persists despite the commitment and determination of successive housing Ministers. In February, Shelter published a report which showed that it is helping a record number of homeless and badly housed people—it helped 64,000 households last year—through its national network of housing aid centres which are supported by central and local government grants as well as, of course, by charitable donations. The report also clearly demonstrated how crucial a decent home is to stable family life and how homelessness causes great individual misery and leads to increasing burdens on the taxpayer.

In 1993, some 139,790 households in England were accepted as homeless under the law, although many more sought assistance under the legislation and were not accepted. Although there has been a welcome decline in the number of people accepted as homeless since 1992, research by Shelter published last year showed that many authorities believe that the reduction in numbers was due to a temporary increase in the supply of housing association homes following measures in the 1992 autumn statement.

There remains considerable concern that homelessness will increase once again as the housing association development programme of homes to rent is reduced next year. The output by housing associations of new or rehabilitated homes to rent will be less than a third of what many experts agree is required. The Minister may be interested to learn that the Housing Corporation's assessment of housing needs concluded that about 100,000 low cost homes a year would be needed for the decade up to 2001. Perhaps he will take the opportunity provided by this debate to say whether he agrees with that assessment and what research his Department has carried out on the subject.

It is not just that the number of new homes coming on to the market has been reduced. The volume of new lettings of council and housing association homes has remained relatively static and in many areas the size or type of housing most commonly available to re-let is all too rarely appropriate for those in most urgent need. The success of the right-to-buy scheme, which I whole-heartedly support, has had the practical effect of allowing 1.5 million council houses to be sold, removing them for ever from the system.

The private rented sector is often financially beyond the means of many people, especially the very young, who cannot afford the necessary deposit or rent in advance. In short, in some areas there is not enough decent housing available at affordable rents. One of the largest factors in the homelessness equation—the breakdown of traditional family life—must also be confronted.

Liberal divorce laws, the encouragement of teenage sexual activity and single parenthood, and the general undermining of the family unit—by which I mean the husband and wife and their children bound together by marriage—by taxation and other legislation, have been major contributors to changes in our country's demography. Those changes have led to less stable homes and more fragmentation. Successive Governments cannot ignore their responsibility for those social changes.

There is much evidence of disrepair in the existing housing stock. One in six homes needs urgent repairs costing more than £1,000, and they include more than 2 million owner-occupied homes. Some of those who own their homes continue to face real problems of negative equity, although, thankfully, that problem is less acute in the part of the world that I represent in Cheshire. The problem has been exacerbated by rising interest rates and the fears created by the decision of the Secretary of State for Social Security substantially to reduce income support for mortgage interest payments. That move has prompted the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the Building Societies Association, the House-Builders Federation and the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance to warn of an increase in the number of repossessions next year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who is the chairman of the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance, told the House just a few days ago that, thus far, the house building industry is certainly not participating in the more general economic upturn that we all agree is taking place. That view will be shared by many. Unless the Treasury takes steps to encourage greater confidence in the housing market, there is every prospect that home ownership—participation in the property-owning democracy—will no longer be such a popular option as it has been in the immediate past.

One of my greatest concerns is the effect on family life, on the development of children and thus on the future of our society, of placing too many families in relatively insecure temporary accommodation. I remain concerned that too many local authorities place too many such families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation at an extremely high cost to the public purse. Living in such accommodation is surely bad for the health, education and welfare of families, especially those containing young people. Shelter is to be congratulated on at least highlighting the problems and pressing instead for resources for investment in good quality housing.

A recent report by the Standing Conference on Public Health estimated that homelessness and poor housing conditions were adding a staggering £2 billion a year to health care costs. More than 50,000 families live in

temporary accommodation in which disrepair, overcrowding, shared cooking and sanitary facilities, and lack of space for children's play and study lead to higher rates of infection, depression, anxiety and behavioural problems in children, and an increased number of injuries sustained through accidents. Surely it is not, therefore, a case of being unable to afford the resources to tackle the problem; rather it is illogical and counter-productive to allow those problems to continue further.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will indicate a willingness to agree that all changes in housing policy and benefit arrangements should be assessed against the test of whether they will increase or decrease the number of families in unsuitable bed-and-breakfast accommodation. A classic example of just what can go wrong when bringing forward changes in housing policy is revealed when we consider how the funds saved by reducing housing subsidies to housing associations and councils has been offset by more current and future spending on housing benefit as a result of higher rents. Higher rents also contribute to higher wage demands and thus fuel the inflationary spiral.

A recent survey found that 94 per cent. of the public believe that homeless people should be found homes, although that may be slightly idealistic in some ways. We need to build on that consensus to find a real, lasting and practical solution to the problem. We need an adequate supply of affordable homes for people who need them, and those in the greatest need are the homeless.

In addition, we need an owner-occupied sector which is secure and not just a route into homelessness for some people. We need a housing system that offers mobility, flexibility and real choice. Surely we, the Government, charities and individuals need to do everything that we can to extend measures which help people to keep their homes, and to ensure stability in family life, of which housing is an essential part.

I hope that, if nothing else, this short debate has provided the opportunity for my hon. Friend the Minister to respond constructively to what I have said, to avoid polemics, and to rise to the challenge for the Government to redouble their efforts to tackle a problem. In a relatively wealthy, well run society such as ours, there can be little excuse for the continuation of that problem.

2.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): The principal aim of the Government's housing policy is that a decent home should be within reach of every family. Relieving homelessness is an important part of our housing policy. Figures collected for my Department each quarter by local authorities show that fewer and fewer households are becoming homeless and requiring local authority help to obtain accommodation.

For the past two and a half years, there has been a reduction every quarter in the year-on-year numbers of households accepted for rehousing under homelessness legislation. The figures show that the Government have been successful in encouraging authorities to move away from using bed and breakfast hotels as temporary accommodation for homeless households. The number of homeless applicants living in bed and breakfast accommodation at the end of September 1994 was only about a third of the number three years previously.

A number of authorities use short-term leases of privately rented accommodation as a better alternative to provide good quality temporary accommodation for homeless households. To help authorities to continue to provide that accommodation, we shall shortly be laying regulations which will extend for up to a further two years the period for which such leases can be held without the cost scoring as capital expenditure.

Our policies are dealing with the needs of people sleeping rough. The Government's six-year £180 million rough sleepers initiative in central London is widely regarded as having had considerable success in reducing the number of people sleeping on the streets of the capital. A count by voluntary agencies last November found about 290 people sleeping rough in central London, a reduction on estimates of more than 1,000 before the initiative began in 1990. Independent research into the first three years of the initiative also showed that several thousand people had been helped to find accommodation through the initiative, and that many more had been prevented from becoming homeless in the first place.

Many of the people who remain on the streets of central London are the "hard core" of rough sleepers who may have slept out for a number of years. They may suffer from alcohol or drug abuse, or they may have mental health problems. The needs of those people can best be met by focused co-operation by health authorities, social services departments, housing authorities and voluntary sector agencies. We have to accept, however, that some long-term rough sleepers will be resistant to offers of accommodation and that it may take time to persuade them to come inside.

My ministerial colleagues and I have paid a number of visits to projects for single homeless people in central London, managed by excellent voluntary sector organisations such as Centrepoint, St. Mungo's, Crisis and the Salvation Army. Many of those are funded by the Department. One cannot fail to be impressed by the way in which those agencies seek to provide assistance for individuals who would otherwise sleep rough.

By March 1996, the rough sleepers initiative will have provided about 5,000 places in a range of permanent and temporary accommodation, as well as outreach and resettlement workers who contact people sleeping on the sheets and help them to start a new life away from the streets. The initiative has shown how voluntary and statutory agencies can work together towards the relief of single homelessness.

Outside central London, it is the responsibility of local authorities to consider the needs of people sleeping rough as part of their overall housing strategy. I commend to local authorities the model of co-operation between statutory and voluntary agencies developed under the rough sleepers initiative. For our part, the Government pay grants under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 to voluntary agencies which provide direct and practical help for single homeless people. In 1994-95, £6.8 million has been made available to more than 150 projects.

As well as specific action to prevent and relieve homelessness, the Government are pursuing wider policies aimed at expanding the housing options available to everyone. Eighty per cent. of respondents to surveys said that they would prefer to own their own homes. There can no doubting our success in expanding owner-occupation. The right to buy for council tenants has brought home ownership to more than 1.6 million

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

families in Great Britain. We are widening the choice for tenants who want to become home owners. The local authority cash incentive schemes and the Housing Corporation's incentive schemes for tenants have helped a further 21,000 people to buy homes. Those schemes have the additional benefit of freeing council or housing association dwellings to house more families in greatest need.

We shall continue to give high priority to bringing the option of owner-occupation within the reach of more people. Since house prices and interest rates are both low, home ownership is more affordable than it has been for years, so now is a good time for people to think about buying.

We recognise, of course, that not everyone will be able to afford to buy a home outright, particularly young people, so our policies also deal with the demand for rented accommodation. In particular, we are keen to expand the role played by the private rented sector in offering accommodation to people in housing need. It is a mistake to assume that private rented accommodation will, by definition, be inadequate. For many families, it is the right and most flexible answer. With several hundred thousand vacant private sector homes in England, scope exists for bringing more homes into private renting to help meet housing demand.

We have introduced a number of initiatives to achieve that. For example, housing associations have become involved in the management of private rented stock. Acting as managing agents, they have brought benefits to tenants, through the provision of a high level of service and security, and to landlords by providing a high quality, hassle-free intermediary. To build on this initiative, a new scheme—HAMA Plus—has been introduced. It will provide an additional £5 million in 1994-95 to housing associations providing management services to bring empty properties back into shape and back into use. Housing associations have also been central to the flats-over-shops initiative, which not only brings unused space back into use but brings new life to abandoned areas of our high streets.

Local authorities themselves have also done a great deal. A number have introduced imaginative schemes to encourage local landlords to co-operate with them in housing families and others in need. One approach that is achieving impressive results is the introduction of rent and deposit guarantee schemes. They give landlords the reassurances that they may require to house low-income tenants and can dramatically increase the chances of such households gaining access to rented accommodation.

There is now some evidence of an increase in private lettings. The number has grown from just over 1.6 million in 1988 to just under 2 million at the end of 1993. It is important that we continue to reinforce that trend in recognition of the vital role that a healthy private sector can play in meeting housing need. But the social rented sector also has, and will continue to have, a role to play in providing long-term, settled housing for families who need help.

It is difficult to estimate the need for social housing at national level because it depends on how need is defined and short-term fluctuations in factors affecting access to owner-occupation, such as house prices and interest rates. However, many publicly quoted estimates of 100,000 homes a year seem to us to be overstated.

We are investing significant sums of money in social housing. Public resources to housing associations—the main providers of new low-cost housing for rent and for sale—are more than £1.5 billion this year, enabling some 60,000 new lettings to be provided. That will bring the total over the three years to 31 March 1995 to more than 180,000, an all-time high level of housing association provision and about 27,000 more homes than we promised in the 1992 Conservative manifesto.Over the next three years—1995-96 to 1997-98—we expect Housing Corporation and local authority expenditure together, and the private finance that they will attract, to produce a further 180,000 new lettings.

If local authorities are to make the best use of those new lettings and the existing stock, they need fair and rational systems for allocating their housing and their nominations for housing association tenancies. The courts' interpretation of the current homelessness legislation has made that impossible in some areas. At present, households who happen to apply for assistance under the homelessness legislation are automatically placed on a fast track for housing allocations, irrespective of whether they have the greatest need for long-term social housing. Meanwhile, families in need on the housing waiting list are left standing. For that reason, we are committed to reform.

Our proposals would separate the allocation of long-term tenancies from the provision of immediate assistance to the homeless. Quite simply, those who have the greatest need for long-term social housing should get the highest priority, whether or not they have been accepted as homeless by the local authority. At the same time, we are committed to retaining an effective safety net for homeless families and vulnerable people to ensure that those groups have access to suitable accommodation.

The relentless growth in the number of households in this country has presented a formidable challenge for our policies on housing throughout the Government's period in office. I am pleased to say that those policies have withstood the test and are succeeding in dealing with homelessness and increasing the supply of dwellings. We have also expanded the housing options available, so that more people than ever before have the opportunity to own their own homes.

2.23 pm

Sitting suspended.

2.30 pm

On resuming:—

It being half past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

CONTINGENCIES FUND 1993-94

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return of the Accounts of the Contingencies Fund, 1993-94, showing:—

(1) The Receipts and Payments in connection with the Fund in the year ended the 31st day of March 1994.

The Distribution of the Capital of the Fund at the commencement and close of the year; with the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office

1. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to assess the opinion of the public on the future of the Post Office.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The Government issued a Green Paper on the future of postal services in June last year.

Mr. Raynsford: As the President of the Board of Trade appears a little coy on this issue, may I remind him of the implacable opposition of the British people to the privatisation of postal services? May I also remind him that the people of Greenwich are equally opposed to the back-door privatisation of their post office by Post Office Counters, which is trying to close the Crown post office and to hand it to a franchisee, probably operating from the back of a supermarket?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will know that the unions tried to organise a strike on the issue on Monday. I am pleased to tell the House that that strike was even more of a failure than the one a few weeks ago.

Mr. Dover: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the main difficulty is that the public still believe that he has it in mind to privatise Post Office Counters, whereas our only proposal is to privatise Royal Mail?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right. More than 19,000 post offices are in the private sector and only a relatively small number—a few hundred—are Crown post offices. The proposals that the Government considered were related to the privatisation of Royal Mail.

Regional Electricity Companies

2. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with the Director General of Electricity Supply about the pay and perks of directors and executives of the South Wales, Northern and Eastern regional electricity companies.

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions. The regulator has no responsibility for these matters.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is it not a fact that the chairman of the South Wales electricity company has received a 68 per cent. rise in pay, that the chairman of Northern Electric has received a 46 per cent. rise and that the chairman of Eastern Electricity has received a 110 per cent. rise? When will it dawn on Ministers that the British public are scandalised by the way in which the bosses of privatised monopolies are making vast sums, beyond the dreams of avarice, out of consumers? The bosses are up to their ankles in the trough and they went in head first. When will Ministers realise that this scandal must be dealt with, that the responsibility is theirs and that they must take action?

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that we are awaiting the

consideration of the Greenbury committee. The committee will consider these issues, among others. The Government have made it clear that if, after receipt of the recommendations, it is felt appropriate to legislate, we shall certainly consider doing so.

Mr. Batiste: Is not the real point that, as Professor Littlechild demonstrated so clearly this week, the regulator has all the powers necessary to look after the interests of the British consumer? His new intervention is good news for the British consumer, who will get even lower electricity prices as a consequence of the privatisation programme.

Mr. Eggar: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) in the debate only 10 days ago criticised the regulator because, allegedly, he was not taking enough account of the interests of consumers. Following the regulator's announcement yesterday, the right hon. Gentleman attacked him for not taking account of the interests of the shareholders.

Dr. John Cunningham: Is it not strange that, after the extraordinary events of the past 48 hours, the President of the Board of Trade is not making a statement about them and about the consequences of the regulator's announcement? Far from attacking Professor Littlechild, as the Minister wrongly claimed, I welcomed his belated action yesterday. Is it not clear from his announcement that electricity consumers have been massively overcharged and fleeced of perhaps billions of pounds over the past four or five years? What action do Ministers intend to take to ensure that the regulator acts now to reduce electricity prices further? Is it not clear that electricity shares are overpriced exactly because consumers have been overcharged?

As officials and Ministers in the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry knew of Professor Littlechild's intention to consider a price review before the sale of PowerGen and National Power shares, is not that inside information, as defined in part V of the Criminal Justice Act 1993? As we saw yesterday, beyond question the matter was price-sensitive. In withholding that information, are not Ministers and officials guilty of either absolute negligence or complete dishonesty in their handling of this affair?

Mr. Eggar: What is absolutely clear is that the Labour party opposed privatisation, and therefore opposed the benefits to consumers which have already flowed from privatisation, including a reduction in real terms in electricity prices of 9 per cent. over the past two years. The right hon. Gentleman says that the consumers have been ripped off. He seems to have forgotten the record of the previous Labour Government, when real electricity prices rose by 22 per cent. between 1974 and 1979.

With regard to the right hon. Gentleman's outrageous allegation towards the end of his long question, may I refer him to the article in *The Guardian* on Saturday, which made it very clear that he had written to the regulator asking for a reduction in prices ahead of 1 April? Did he say to the stock exchange—*[Interruption.]* This is very relevant. The right hon. Gentleman has accused my right hon. Friends and me of misleading the public who have bought Generating Company shares. The right hon. Gentleman did not refer the letter that he wrote to the regulator to the stock exchange, nor did he give any indication in that letter, as I understand it, that there was any expectation that the political pressure that the right hon. Gentleman was trying to bring to bear on the regulator would have any impact on the Genco sales.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: When considering the pay of directors of regional electricity companies and, indeed, companies as a whole, does my hon. Friend agree that those matters are not for the Government but for the shareholders who own the companies? To make that system effective, will my hon. Friend consider the possibility of shareholders having, by law, to vote every year on the pay and perks of their directors, just as they presently have to vote for the reappointment of auditors?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend has made an interesting suggestion, and it may be one of the things that the Greenbury committee will consider.

Post Office

3. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many post offices now have agency status.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): A total of 18,960.

Mrs. Roche: Given that more than 1,300 people in my constituency have signed a petition opposing the change to agency status at Muswell Hill post office and that the senior area manager in charge of that post office has told me that he does not know of one person who supports the change, why are the Government foisting that change on my constituents and on people up and down the country?

Mr. Page: Any proposal to change from Crown to agency status is the decision of Post Office Counters. May I give the hon. Lady a little hope for the future? When such a conversion takes place, an independent survey is made immediately and in 99 per cent. of cases the public have deemed themselves generally satisfied with the move.

Mr. McLoughlin: May I welcome my hon. Friend to his new post? He is absolutely right to say that conversions of Crown post offices have been generally accepted. Will he confirm that one of the usual benefits of the conversion policy is that post offices under agency status open longer and give a far better service to the public? Will he not be distracted by the synthetic strike action which failed miserably this week?

Mr. Page: I thank my hon. Friend for those kind words. He is right; Monday's strike was a miserable flop. Only 75 Crown post offices shut, while 740 stayed open—and of course, the 18,960 agency post offices were still there to provide service to the customer. Moreover, the proof of the pudding is in the eating: when conversions take place, we find that the level of trade increases.

Manufacturing Industry

4. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of gross domestic product was invested in manufacturing industry in 1993.

Mr. Heseltine: Manufacturing investment was 2.3 per cent of gross domestic product in 1993 and 10.2 per cent. of manufacturing output, when measured at constant prices.

Mr. Campbell: But is it not true that, in the past 15 years, 40 per cent. of jobs in manufacturing industry have been lost? There was the loss of the pits, the loss of the shipyards and the loss of the steelworks—and the Government do not even know that they have done it.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is trying to imply that the overmanning that had done so much to hurt British industry could somehow be sustained. He should allow us enormous credit for the fact that Britain is now manufacturing at far higher productivity rates and is therefore far more competitive than it was. Investment forecasts for manufacturing industry next year are seen to be rising significantly.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that among the factors that influence investment in manufacturing industry are the levels of manufacturing output and of interest rates? As manufacturing output fell significantly in January, the most recent month for which figures have been recorded, is it not a great relief to my right hon. Friend that we are no longer in the exchange rate mechanism, and are not being forced to raise our interest rates today, along with the countries that had the misfortune to remain in the ERM, which will crucify their domestic economies because of their loyalty to the European dream?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has very strong views on that subject, and I admire his ingenuity in trying to exploit them in the context of the question. But that is not relevant to our position today, because the outlook for British manufacturing investment for next year is extremely encouraging.

Mr. Wilson: Do not the appalling figures for manufacturing output released this morning give the lie to the over-inflated hype that we hear from the Government about the success of manufacturing and about the recovery? Is it not extraordinary that, when exports are doing relatively well, factory output is falling? What does that tell us about domestic demand? Is it not true that all the claims about economic recovery are fragile and that the real economy, as represented by this morning's figures, has little to do with the world of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and of the Governor of the Bank of England?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman does not live in the real world. The figures announced today show that output in January was 4.3 per cent. higher than output a year ago, and that productivity in the fourth quarter of last year was 5.9 per cent. higher than that of a year ago. The latest CBI forecasts show an 8.4 per cent. growth in manufacturing investment this year, and those by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research show an increase of 9.3 per cent. When will Opposition Members recognise success when they see it?

Sir Donald Thompson: Is it not obvious to my right hon. Friend and to the rest of the House that, as unemployment is falling, manufacturing industry and other industries are improving?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right. Employment is increasing both in manufacturing industry and in the service industries, and one of the most exciting things that is happening is that British manufacturing exports are rising significantly throughout the world. All the forecasts suggest a better year this year, and an even better one next year.

Post Office

5. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the Post Office concerning proposals to employ additional part-time staff to replace full-time staff.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions. Staffing levels and working patterns within the Post Office are a matter for Post Office management, not the Government. I understand that the Royal Mail wholly refutes the allegations of target cuts in full-time postal jobs made in recent press reports.

Mr. Prentice: Is not the accelerating casualisation of the work force of the Post Office directly attributable to the uncertainty about the future of the organisation and to the Government's unwillingness to make plain what they intend to do about the Post Office in the future? Should not the Government give the Post Office commercial freedom to expand its business and to create new full-time jobs instead of allowing it to twist in the wind with no clear idea of where its future lies?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman appears to be totally unaware that the Post Office employs 115,000 full-time staff, that it is committed to improving the standards of services delivered both to households and to businesses, and that it has a fine record which is second to none in the world.

Sir Peter Emery: In considering staff matters, will my hon. Friend look at the problems of staffing in contracted-out post offices in relation to motor vehicle licences? However much we may welcome the new sub-postmasters, something is very wrong when many of them cannot issue vehicle licences. A constituent of mine had to motor 60 miles to get a licence, and that is nonsense.

Mr. Eggar: I shall look into my hon. Friend's specific concern. As a matter of general policy, we are encouraging Post Office Counters and sub-post offices in particular to expand their business opportunities and to improve the width and breadth of the services which they can offer to constituents.

Mr. Hain: The Minister must know that the switch from full-time to part-time staff has come about because of the cost-cutting that has been forced on the Post Office as a result of the Government's dithering over its future and their failure to give the Post Office commercial freedom. Will he come clean on the fact that one of the results of that will be a decline in the number of second deliveries? There has been a contraction in second deliveries, but, as more part-timers are employed by the Post Office, the Government's long-term objectives of getting a once-over-the-ground service and sacrificing second deliveries will be the result.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman appears to be unaware that the reason why fewer letters are delivered on the second delivery is that the Royal Mail has so improved

its service that the vast majority of letters are delivered on the first delivery. If there are no letters left, it is hardly surprising if few are delivered.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Dykes.

Mr. Dykes: May I thank my hon. Friend—

Madam Speaker: Order. I was calling the hon. Gentleman to ask Question 6.

Machine Tool Exports

6. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the development of United Kingdom machine tool exports in recent months.

Mr. Eggar: I am not sure whether to apologise to my hon. Friend or not.

The Department takes a continual interest in the export performance of industry. Export sales of machine tools at current prices in the fourth quarter of 1994 were almost double the level achieved in the same period in 1993. In the first three quarters of 1994, the machine tool industry ran an estimated balance of payments surplus of £40 million.

Mr. Dykes: With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, I shall try to ask a question about the Post Office on another occasion.

I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Does he agree that, after years of battering and decline, the machine tool industry has now significantly turned the corner and is producing much improved figures? Would he say that that was due to the recent devaluation of the pound or to reinvestment?

Mr. Eggar: It is due to the first-class commitment by management in the machine tool industry towards identifying significant new export opportunities and to a considerable commitment by the work force to additional training. The industry has a record of which Members on both sides of the House should be proud.

Mr. Barry Jones: On the vital subject of manufacturing, can the Minister tell us why the Chancellor of the Exchequer believed that Consett steel works was producing steel?

Mr. Eggar: The Chancellor is extremely proud of the fine record of manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom. He is also extremely proud of the record of inward investment in the north-east of England. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that my right hon. and learned Friend is proud of the introduction of Nissan, Samsung and many other allied companies.

Telecommunications

7. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on the relative costs of telecommunications services in the member states of the European Union.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): Studies for my Department and by other bodies show that United Kingdom telecommunications costs are among the lowest in Europe. The UK is pressing for rapid liberalisation of European telecommunications to bring down costs throughout the Union and to stimulate multi-media communications.

Mrs. Knight: As low telecommunications costs are an essential element in ensuring that business is competitive, when does my hon. Friend expect liberalisation to take place throughout the European Union and does he expect that British Telecom will benefit from that?

Mr. Taylor: I am delighted to confirm that the Telecoms Council last November set a date of 1 January 1998 for complete liberalisation of voice telephony and infrastructure, and Commissioner Bangemann has confirmed that that is the date by which liberalisation must have taken place, not the date from which it should commence. That is tremendously good news for European industry, but it is especially good news for industry in this country competing in the newly liberalised markets, given the experience of competitive telecommunications and falling costs that we have had for many years.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that one of the important considerations affecting costs in the sector is the extent to which fibre-optic linking will be made available, not only in the industrial cities and conurbations, but throughout all areas in these islands? Will he give an assurance that, in developing policy, he will bear that in mind and ensure terms and conditions of agreement with contracting companies which place an obligation on providing services to rural as well as to industrial areas?

Mr. Taylor: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that we must ensure that access to the super-highway covers the whole country and not just parts of it. We are considering licensing those parts of the country that are not yet covered by the cable industry, but the most interesting way to take that service to the really rural areas is probably through alternative technologies, such as use of the radio spectrum. I am studying the outlying parts of Wales with the Secretary of State for Wales to find out how quickly we can produce proposals on the use of the radio spectrum to bring together the rural communities.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my hon. Friend accept that he deserves considerable congratulation, as the breakthrough in telecommunications will be of great benefit to the British telecommunications industry, as he rightly said, and to consumers throughout the European Union? Will he be emboldened by that success to press forward, together with his colleagues, to ensure that we extend the single market to energy and the airline industry, and go for complete airline deregulation in very short order as well?

Mr. Taylor: It is always good to have the support of my hon. Friends in this matter. I also had the support of the other Ministers at the G7 conference the weekend before last when it was made clear in the conclusions that British policies had set the agenda. There is no doubt that within the European Union we should extend the benefits of the competitive market to energy and the airline industry. That will require us to stiffen the resolve of the European Commission and to ensure that, once member states agree regulations, the European Court of Justice has adequate powers to take action if countries do not obey the rules to which their political leaders have agreed.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Does not the Minister realise that many domestic households in this country have fewer phones than households in our competitor countries because of the very high connection charges, which are

higher in Britain than in Sweden, Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Belgium, Portugal, Luxembourg, the United States, France, Germany and Canada?

Mr. Taylor: The point about telephones is that the overall costs in this country are among the lowest in the European Union. They are slightly above those in Sweden, which has also liberalised. The key condition for telecommunications is liberalisation and Opposition Members should remember that, given the amount of opposition with which they met our telecommunications policies over the years. We have a proud record in telecommunications and it has given us, through the alternative infrastructure of the cable industry, access to even cheaper connection and standing charges, as will have been seen from the policy announced by Nynex Communications only last week, when it cut the cost of telephony by 25 per cent.

Sir Michael Grylls: Does my hon. Friend agree that the transformation of a sleepy British Telecommunications and a nationalised Cable and Wireless—as it was—into world-class companies that are winning orders and being very successful throughout the world is a huge tribute to the success of the privatisation programme and the fact that they are able to compete and win business in Europe? We must continue pressing to open the market, so that those very successful and now private companies can win more and more orders.

Mr. Taylor: Britain now has 150 public telephone operator licensees, having started with just one in the early 1980s. BT has therefore had to face competition in the domestic market and, increasingly, in the local loop from the cable industry. It is therefore a more successful company. Whenever I go to other countries and talk to their telecommunication industry leaders and Ministers, they want BT to join partnerships with them. I am delighted at the success of both BT and Cable and Wireless in helping British exports and making use of their new-found competitive instincts.

Chemical Industry

8. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to increase the participation of women in the chemical industry.

Mr. Page: The continuing competitiveness of the chemical industry depends on it attracting and retaining high-quality employees, both male and female. My Department is in regular contact with the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Chemical Industries Association and the Office of Science and Technology's development unit for women, in order to promote the role of women within the chemical industry.

Mr. Watson: The Minister's response betrays the fact that he is totally unaware of figures provided by the Chemical Industries Association, which show that, of some 280,000 workers within the industry, only a third are women. Is he further aware that a working party established by member companies of the CIA and trade unions in the industry have unearthed considerable evidence of job segregation, which prevents women from reaching many of the more influential and better-paid jobs in the industry? On International Women's Day, how does he intend to stop that waste of talent and ensure that women's skills are utilised fully throughout the chemical industry?

Mr. Page: I accept that the industry starts from a low base, but I do not accept the doom and gloom scenario that the hon. Gentleman advances. For example, the Chemical Industries Association has produced an equal opportunities self-assessment pack, which enables chemical companies to implement equal opportunities. In 1992-93, 36 per cent. of first degree graduates in chemistry were female. That is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend recognise that I am the son of a lady research chemist, and that the lady whom my mother once succeeded in a job as a research chemist in the 1950s, our right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher, has made the most significant contribution to Britain and the world of any research chemist ever?

Mr. Page: I had often wondered what made my hon. Friend so special, and now I know.

News in that direction is encouraging. The proportion of women studying chemical engineering is rising: in 1988, the figure was some 17 per cent. and in 1993 it had risen to 22 per cent. Again, figures are going in the right direction.

Departmental Offices

9. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to offer flexitime and parental leave in offices run by his Department.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Flexible working hours arrangements already operate extensively throughout the DTI and its agencies. All such arrangements are set up locally.

Mr. Ross: Does the Minister agree that the development of the executive agencies is putting the availability of flexitime and parental leave at risk? Given that both flexitime and parental leave are important to encourage, maintain and help women back to work, will he outline to the House his proposals to ensure that both parental leave and flexitime are safeguarded within those agencies?

Mr. Taylor: Given that the DTI is setting the lead with its "Investors in People" programme, which will make extremely good commitments to all DTI employees, I have no doubt that the various agencies will make their own local arrangements. Throughout the civil service, flexitime is increasing because that is what employees want. We are also safeguarding parental leave. If the hon. Gentleman has a constituency example that is causing him concern, I hope that he will write to me. Overall, we find that the reactions of staff to how they are treated within the agencies and the DTI are encouraging.

Mr. Harry Greenway: What measures is my hon. Friend's Department taking to encourage and allow people to work at home, as part of the flexi-arrangements that he has described?

Mr. Taylor: One specific way is that, as we roll out new technology, and as Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology, I am encouraging tele-working. There is no doubt that the ability to access from home the

same computers, and in the same real time, as those used in the office, will be an interesting way of proceeding to avoid people having to commute every day simply to gain access to office information and material and to make a contribution.

Solent Routes

10. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade who will be conducting the inquiry into the Solent routes following the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report; and when he expects to make an announcement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): The Director General of Fair Trading will review the cross-Solent ferry services market this year, as announced in 1992 on publication of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report. I understand that the director general is to seek the opinions of interested parties shortly and will announce his findings in due course.

Mr. Field: Following the escape from Parkhurst prison, my hon. Friend and the nation now appreciate just how difficult it is to leave the Isle of Wight. Although the majority of my constituents appreciate the tremendous improvement that has taken place in the quality of service on the cross-Solent ferry routes, nevertheless anxieties remain about the high prices.

I should like my hon. Friend to be able to reassure me that the next, and second, inquiry will consider costs carefully, especially as the first inquiry concluded that the ferry routes to the Isle of Wight are the most expensive in the whole of the world, yet reached no conclusion.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend has always given special attention to that issue, and I recognise that. He must be aware that the MMC's report concluded three years ago that, although there was a monopoly position on the Isle of Wight in favour of Wightlink, it did not operate against the public interest in terms of profits or fares, and that that restricts the power of the President of the Board of Trade to take remedial action. We do not have legal power to act unless there is an adverse finding by the MMC.

In that context, the then Secretary of State announced that the position continued to require monitoring, and for that reason the position would be reviewed three years later. That review is to take place, and I am sure that the opinions outlined yet again by my hon. Friend will be expressed to the director general.

Investment

11. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to help ensure that profit-making British companies invest in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government have pursued, and will continue to pursue, the policies that have turned the United Kingdom into an attractive place for investment, whether by British or overseas companies. Since 1979, the volume of investment in plant and machinery has increased by more than a half, and total business investment by more than a third. The United Kingdom is second only to the United States in attracting overseas investment.

Mr. Hughes: Does the President recognise the tendency of British companies, after they have made profits as a result of the efforts of their work force, to invest those profits abroad? Will he also recognise that it follows that Britain now has a record of investment that is about the lowest in the industrialised world? Bearing in mind the persisting high level of unemployment, what will the Government do about that position?

Mr. Heseltine: The first thing that I would advise the hon. Gentleman to do is return to his constituency and explain that unemployment has decreased by 430 in the past 12 months. Then perhaps he will move on to Electrotech Ltd., which has announced the creation of another 200 new jobs in the next three years. After that, he can go to British Steel at Llanwern, which has announced the creation of 150 jobs. After that— *[Interruption.]* I know that Opposition Members cannot take that, because things are going too well for them. After that, the hon. Gentleman can go on to Castle Leisure in his constituency, which has announced the creation of 80 new jobs. By the time that he has finished that journey, there will probably be some more good news.

Sir Cranley Onslow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the biggest possible deterrent to profitable investment anywhere in the United Kingdom would be the imposition of the provisions of the social chapter?

Mr. Heseltine: I am in absolute agreement with my right hon. Friend that, if the Labour party ever had the chance to introduce the social chapter, that would be the biggest single accelerator of unemployment that one could impose on our manufacturing base.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the President of the Board of Trade recall that, when ICI was under threat from Lord Hanson, the whole House held that company's commitment to investment in high regard? On 24 February, Bryan Bullock, the ICI power services manager, said:

"The UK's largest industrial consumers for whom electricity is a feedstock cannot wait indefinitely for competition to emerge and will emigrate overseas".

Does the President agree with that statement? How long must we wait for Littlechild to change his mind about that issue? Is the President prepared to intervene to defend the major energy consumers in the UK and to give them the fair crack of the whip internationally that they have not had previously because of the regulator's indifference to their concerns?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is fully aware that we recently changed the law to provide companies such as ICI with the opportunity to generate their own on-site electricity. I believe that ICI has already taken advantage of that new flexibility.

This is a question about Britain's interests in investment and in our major companies. ICI, whose officer the hon. Gentleman has quoted, is one of Britain's jewels in the crown. It invests across the world, earns profits across the world and carries the flag of British industry into every corner of the world economy.

Sir Dudley Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential that he continues to encourage the

highly successful British pharmaceutical industry, to ensure that it remains firmly anchored in this country as one of the jewels in the crown to which he referred?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will realise that we give every encouragement to the pharmaceutical industry, which is one of Britain's leading industries. There is massive investment in that industry, and we are pioneering new drugs which are extremely important for our future.

Share Options

12. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he proposes to introduce to regulate the issue of share options.

Mr. Evans: Share options and other aspects of directors' pay are under consideration by the Greenbury committee. I have no plans to introduce any measures in advance of that committee's findings.

Mr. Clapham: I am rather surprised at the Minister's answer, particularly in view of the public concern, of which he must be aware, and in the light of the Prime Minister's acceptance of Labour's position that something must be done about boardroom excesses. The Minister must also be aware that it was revealed recently that 77 directors of the private electricity companies had awarded themselves £72 million in share options. In the light of that, does he agree that it is in the public interest for the Government to regulate to control boardroom excesses?

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that the Government are prepared to give legislative backing to any proposals from the Greenbury committee which require such back-up. We are prepared to examine that issue.

However, the hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that share options as a whole should be opposed. We believe that well-devised share option schemes help to motivate key staff and to reward high performance. I welcome proposals from institutional investors to ensure that share options are linked to realistic measures of management performance. The hon. Gentleman should also know that listed companies are required to give the stock exchange full details of their share option schemes.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that, rather than having share options, it would be much more motivating, stimulating and sensible if executive bonuses were linked to movements of the FT Index, so that executives shared the losses as well as the profits, as do shareholders? Is that not precisely what British Gas is proposing?

Mr. Evans: The Government primarily take the view that companies should decide the pay levels of their staff. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Greenbury committee has said that it is drawing up a code of conduct on that subject. I know that the committee is prepared to examine a wide variety of possible forthcoming proposals.

Dr. John Cunningham: The abuse of share options is widespread among privatised monopoly utilities such as gas, water and electricity. The Government have a Bill about the gas industry before the House, but why does it contain no proposals to end those abuses in the interest of the consumer? Would it not be better for the President of the Board of Trade, instead of pouring out his energy wastefully in the bluff and bluster that we have just heard, to expend it more efficiently in taking the action which people the length and breadth of the country want to end the abuses? The opportunity exists now. Why do not the Government take it, or is it once again the Prime Minister expressing distaste for something but doing nothing about it?

Mr. Evans: Many in the House will find it strange and inconsistent on the part of the Opposition that, although they attack the whole concept of the share options, they tabled an amendment to the Finance Bill, the effect of which would have been to grant unlimited tax relief to company directors on fees paid for tax advice on the best time to exercise share options—a proposal that "Accountancy Age" said had tax planners in Britain licking their lips with anticipation.

Inward Investment

13. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps his Department is taking to encourage inward investment into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heseltine: A number of steps have been taken recently to strengthen the United Kingdom's inward investment promotion. These include the appointment of a new chief executive and moves to set up a computerised database to improve the presentation of all relevant information to prospective investors. Currently, proposals for upgrading the United Kingdom overseas marketing efforts and an "aftercare" programme for existing investors are being developed.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware that 40 per cent. of Japanese inward investment into Europe and 43 per cent. of American investment into Europe comes into Britain? Does he agree that that is because Britain has more to offer than any other European country?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and we can add to the figures she gave the results now coming from Korea and Taiwan and the flow of companies coming here from Europe itself. It may interest the House, as this is such an important part of the reconstruction and rebirth of our manufacturing base, if I say that, in 1993-94, the Invest in Britain Bureau recorded 428 inward investment decisions, creating or safeguarding 99,000 jobs. If one takes the figures from 1979-80 to 1993-94, the IBB recorded more than 4,000 projects with more than 600,000 associated jobs.

Mr. Beggs: Can the President of the Board of Trade assure the House that Northern Ireland gets equal promotion with other regions of the United Kingdom when inward investment is being attracted, or is it left to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ministers, the Industrial Development Board or perhaps the present Minister for Trade, who did an excellent job when he was a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office?

Mr. Heseltine: The Invest in Britain Bureau is responsible for the United Kingdom, but in respect of the actual availability of cash to help the stimulation of

inward investment, the hon. Gentleman will be as aware as the rest of the House that Northern Ireland receives more than its proportionate share.

Mr. Bell: The President of the Board of Trade did not mention the fact that most of the multinationals that have come to our country have created works councils under the social protocol. We now have more multinationals with works councils than any other European country. I am grateful to the President of the Board of Trade, who, when he visited Samsung, recognised the work of Hartlepool council and Stockton council in getting Samsung to our area and the significant effort made by the work force, but can he not tell us now that he has made better arrangements with the Treasury for more regional assisted schemes? Will there be better infrastructure, and how will we meet the competition from Europe to get more regional development flowing our way?

Mr. Heseltine: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman could have heard what I or my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs said. Britain is getting far in excess of any proportional share of inward investment flowing into the European Union. It is coming here because overseas investors see Britain as one of the most competitive places in Europe in which to invest. One of the reasons for that is that we do not have the social chapter which the Opposition would impose.

Dr. Twinn: In continuing his successful campaign to bring inward investment into Britain, will my right hon. Friend highlight the excellent location to be found in north London, Edmonton and Enfield, which is made even more excellent by the good help in the real terms of economic assistance given by him and by his Government?

Mr. Heseltine: I shall do my best to help my hon. Friend. He will know that he is not alone in making such suggestions.

14. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what his Department is doing currently to encourage inward investment in York.

Mr. Eggar: The Invest in Britain Bureau is providing £1.27 million in grant in the current year for the Yorkshire and Humberside development agency for the encouragement of inward investment in the whole of Yorkshire and Humberside—which, of course, includes York. It is important that local authorities such as York work in close partnership with the YHDA.

Mr. Bayley: Is the Minister aware that the Swiss-based multi-national company ABB Rail Vehicles Ltd. is one of the companies that have invested heavily in the British economy during the last few years? It has invested £50 million in the York carriage works. That investment, however, is likely to be written off by the company because of the Government's failure to ensure continuity in orders for new trains for British Rail.

What kind of advertisement for inward investment in the United Kingdom is provided when changes in Government policy mean that investors lose their money? What do the Government intend to do to ensure that British Rail places an order for trains to keep the York works open, and to maintain a viable rolling stock manufacturing industry in our country?

Mr. Eggar: I suppose that it would have been too much to expect the hon. Gentleman to draw attention to the successes of investment in the York area—for example, the decision by Samsung Heavy Industries to invest in manufacturing industries at Flaxby. It is the first time that a Korean company has done so.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned ABB. British Rail has invested heavily: some £4 billion has been invested in rolling stock since 1979, and over the past 10 years nearly 4,000 new locomotives and vehicles have entered service. The public sector has made a considerable commitment to investment in rolling stock, and ABB must compete for the contracts that are available.

Mr. Waller: The information that my hon. Friend has given about inward investment in Yorkshire and Humberside is welcome. Is it not worrying, however, that the level of high-technology investment by small and medium-sized enterprises that are British-owned is still lower than that of many of their competitors? Will my hon. Friend seek a fiscal and financial environment in which such enterprises are encouraged to invest in the most high-tech equipment to a greater extent?

Mr. Eggar: We are considering all possible ways of encouraging growth in small and medium-sized enterprises. We recognise the critical importance of providing a climate in which established small companies in particular can grow into medium-sized companies, which often means taking advantage of modern technology, new investment opportunities and so on. Business Links can play an important role in that. We are constantly examining issues such as that raised by my hon. Friend; I hope that he will feel free to discuss the matter with us if he wishes.

Women

15. **Ms Estelle Morris:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures his Department is taking to encourage more women to pursue careers in engineering-based and technology-based industries.

Mr. Page: My Department promotes a number of national and regional schemes to encourage women, as well as men, to pursue careers in engineering-based and technology-based industries. Some, such as Insight, Women Into Science and Engineering and Women Into Information Technology, are aimed specifically at girls and women.

Ms Morris: The Minister's answer does not address the question with the urgency that it deserves. Is he aware that, in the last decade, although the number of women gaining engineering degrees has doubled to 15 per cent., the number of chartered engineers who are women has remained at 1 per cent? What action will his Department take to ensure that the skills of women graduating in engineering are not lost to British industry, and that women are encouraged to seek professional engineering status?

Mr. Page: I accept that there is a need to change the perception of the engineering industry, and to get rid of the "oily rag" image. That is why the Government are

promoting 50-odd schemes around the country in an attempt to bring about a greater knowledge of engineering, and in particular the change in attitudes that is at the core of advancement. The Insight Programme, which is being run by the Engineering Training Authority, gives some 500 lower-sixth-form girls a week in universities, and is being supported by British firms.

Mr. Thurnham: I add my warm congratulations to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that there is considerable untapped potential for women in engineering? Is he aware that, when I came to the House, my wife took over the running of the engineering business that I started in 1972 and that is now successfully employing more than 500 people?

Mr. Page: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. As the House knows, some 45 per cent. of the work force is made up by women, and it is only right that they should take their proper place in the professions. My hon. Friend may take comfort from the fact that the proportion of women in management and professional occupations has risen from 25 per cent. in 1984 to some 30 per cent. in 1993.

Iraq

16. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from companies and trade associations about trade with Iraq.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Since 1990, the Department has answered thousands of inquiries about the impact of the sanctions legislation on trade with Iraq, particularly about the humanitarian trade, which is permitted by the United Nations.

Mr. Miller: What action will the Minister take, given the allegations that the French intend to open up trade links with Iraq? Does he not think that that will be a breach of United Nations sanctions?

Mr. Taylor: We are discussing, with our people at the United Nations, the common observance of sanctions policy by all member states. We are aware of reports that certain countries have decided to open up early talks about what might happen after any sanctions are lifted on goods other than humanitarian. We do not, of course, want British industry to be disadvantaged, but that is not itself a justification for Britain not honouring the sanctions policy, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are continuing to have talks to ensure that other countries observe those standards as well.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that Iraq is one of the most evil regimes—if not the most evil—in the world and it would be quite wrong for this country to vote for the lifting of sanctions against that wicked man?

Mr. Taylor: The character of the Iraqi regime is, without question, diabolical, and I do not think that there is any attempt, certainly not by the DTI, to alter our impression. Our repulsion at what is going on in Iraq is very high. On a day-to-day basis, however, Trade Ministers must deal with many issues and we are aware that certain other countries do not have the same upright attitude to sanctions policy. We are in discussion with the Foreign Office, and with the United Nations, on those matters. We are not unaware of the stories coming to us.

Dounreay

17. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the employment of a managing contractor at Dounreay.

Mr. Page: That is a matter for the Government division of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, which is currently reviewing how best to strengthen the management of operations at Dounreay.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister acknowledge that, although the excellence of Dounreay's work is recognised, its safety record, its environmental acceptability, has rested for many years on an integrated management structure? Is he aware that the new structure proposed for the site—a Government division supervising a partly privatised operation, a partly contractorised operation, with possibly as many as three major contractors on-site—is giving rise to some concern about the direction of the site, about its coherence, about its mission? Will he visit that site and bring his new enthusiasm for efficiency, effectiveness and excellence to bear upon the problems and give the leadership which, at the present time, is lacking?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman overwhelms me and I would be only too delighted to come and visit Dounreay in the fulness of time. The further introduction of contractors at Dounreay is currently being considered by the UKAEA. One of the options is the appointment of a managing contractor, but at the moment no decision has been made. Safety, which must obviously be paramount at a site like Dounreay, will still be subject to the nuclear site licensing.

Companies House

18. **Mr. Terry Davis:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has received favouring the contracting out of functions of Companies House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has received representations on the future of Companies House from both supporters and opponents of contracting out. The majority regard Companies House as having made significant improvements over recent years, but there is scope for further improvement. The contracting-out programme provides a framework in which to achieve that.

Mr. Davis: Is it not a fact that on that, as on so many other matters, most respondents disagree with the Government's proposals? How much did it cost the Government to find out what the rest of us have known all along—that most of the customers of Companies House are satisfied with its services and do not want to see them contracted out?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman would do well to exercise a little more caution before swallowing whole the line from the trade unions in this matter. The trade unions had claimed that the SRU report, which is in the Library, had come to a conclusion which was different from that announced by the Government. An examination of the report, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman has carried out, shows that the Government's policy is consistent with what is contained in the report.

World Trade Organisation

19. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy towards the World Trade Organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The new World Trade Organisation is the custodian of the multilateral trading system, which brings great benefits to the United Kingdom in terms of economic wealth, jobs and consumer choice. We intend to encourage it to develop effectively.

Mr. Clappison: Will my hon. Friend comment on the prospect of China joining the World Trade Organisation, given the recent trade issues between China and the United States?

Mr. Taylor: It is important to bring China into a modern multilateral organisation such as the World Trade Organisation. I am in regular talks with the Commissioner who is responsible for European negotiations with China, Sir Leon Brittan, and the prospects look encouraging. The key matter is that China must come in on acceptable terms, otherwise it could destabilise the whole organisation. We have the same sort of worries about China outside the organisation as the Americans, particularly in the matter of piracy of intellectual property and in connection with the music industry, which is a great contributor to our external trade performance.

Mr. MacShane: Can the Minister give some guidance on whom the Government will back as the new director general of the World Trade Organisation? The Minister will know that Mr. Salinas of Mexico dropped out after being linked, via his brother, to the murder of an important politician. The European Union is backing Mr. Raimondi of Italy, who is a strong advocate of social links in world trade. What is Britain's line on the next director general?

Mr. Taylor: It is a jolly good job that the hon. Gentleman is not responsible for our discussions because he has named the wrong Italian, but never mind. Mr. Ruggiero, the Italian, is the solidly backed candidate of the European Union and we have never demurred from that. At the last count on an official trawl, he had 59 votes and Mr. Kim, whom I have met, who has been to see me, and who is an impressive candidate, had only 28 votes. President Salinas had about 27 votes and has backed out.

We are urging all other nations to rally round a clear leader, because it is most important for the World Trade Organisation to get its act together quickly. It can do that credibly only if it has an effective director general. We do not wish to see any uncertainty beyond 15 March, when Mr. Sutherland ceases his temporary period in office.

Earth Observation Satellites

20. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what use his Department makes of the information available from earth observation satellites.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Department of Trade and Industry works with industry and other Government Departments to identify those practical applications of satellite data. The British National Space Centre has sponsored a first round of jointly funded demonstrator programmes with industrial users, including predictions of sugar beet yield, monitoring environmentally sensitive areas, studying coastal zone erosions, identification of offshore oil drilling sites and locations of fishing grounds. I am pleased to announce that an invitation to bid for a second round of demonstrators was announced last week.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend agree that British industry plays a part in space technology of the kind that is involved in earth observation satellites? Can he assure the House that British industry is getting a fair deal from our membership of the European Space Agency?

Mr. Taylor: I am delighted to say that the British space industry is one of the most effective in Europe. It is involved in several joint ventures, such as Matra Marconi Space, with the French. It is a big employer in the United Kingdom and makes a considerable contribution to our balance of payments. It is important for the European Space Agency to devise much more efficient programmes because it currently depends too much on juste retort.

If we could get a much more efficient system of allocating contracts, I am sure that British industry would do even better. It is certainly being backed by the Government's participation in ESA programmes through the Department of Trade and Industry and, I am delighted to say, in earth observation, with other Departments such as the Department of Transport.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the Minister acknowledge the importance of liaison with our European partners in the European Space Agency? Does he realise that Britain can achieve little by itself in that important subject, and that much more can be achieved, especially in monitoring the environment, if we co-ordinate and liaise with our European partners?

Mr. Taylor: I have no doubt about that. We are firmly committed to the European Space Agency. We contribute considerable sums of money to it. However, it needs to be much more efficient in the way in which it exercises its affairs and allocates its programmes, and in its allocation of the science budget, which is the responsibility of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council.

We have said that we do not want to reduce the scope of the science budget, but that we wish it to be delivered more efficiently. In relation to each of those matters, I am sure that, at the ministerial conference, where I shall be representing this country, we shall achieve much more progress with the ESA and, therefore, much better value from the considerable use that Britain makes of information coming from satellites in space.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: There is a point of order from Mr. Jopling.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, you were kind enough to respond to a point of order from the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), when you said that he was correct in his assertion that, when a Bill receives its Second Reading and is referred to Committee, the Committee should reflect the views of the House when it voted.

Of course, I agree that that is an important matter and that it should be taken into account, but other important matters should also be given due weight, most particularly the views of hon. Members who spoke in the Second Reading debate. Would you be kind enough to clarify the position?

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. Like the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) yesterday, the right hon. Gentleman is correct in what he says. Several matters have to be taken into account when hon. Members are nominated to serve on Standing Committees. Standing Order No. 86 embraces them in the words:

"the qualifications of those Members nominated and . . . the composition of the House".

The important point for me to emphasise is that the interpretation of Standing Order No. 86 is normally left to the Committee of Selection, which has been nominated and endorsed by the House. That Committee is given the task of making nominations. Strictly speaking, these matters are not for me.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is known to you that, on 8 March, the Table Office wrote to me to say:

"the Lord Advocate has made it clear that in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken."

My point of order is this. Is the decision a matter for the Table Office, or is it a matter for the Crown Office? The Crown Office's objection to naming individuals other than those already named in previous questions seems an evasion of its responsibilities. My complaint is with the Crown Office, and not with the Table Office.

Madam Speaker: When a question has been refused and the hon. Member concerned wishes to make representations to the Speaker on the matter, the practice is for those to be made privately; they should not be raised by way of a point of order, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman, who is a long-standing Member of the House, realises.

However, these questions are covered by Scottish Office answers to other questions in the hon. Gentleman's name. I confirm that the Department's answers preclude the hon. Gentleman from putting further questions of that sort for a particular period.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for giving you only a few minutes notice of this point of order.

I have in my possession a copy of a Select Committee report issued in November—House of Commons document 385—which makes the strongest possible representations to the Government that time on the Floor of the House must be given to discussing the implications of the draft Euro-proposal for a common format of visa, with a Euro-symbol stamped thereon. The Committee thought the issue so important that it published a separate report, reprinting paragraphs and documents, and making it clear to the Government that it believed that the issue had to be debated at an early date in the House. The Committee may take the view, as I do, that a common format visa will lead inevitably to the mutual recognition of Euro-visas.

Only yesterday, the Leader of the House sent the Committee a letter, dated 7 March, relating to the report of 20 November. It said that, although he thought that there was indeed a case for a debate, we could not have it now, although we might have it soon in European Standing Committee B.

However, I have been advised that a specific proposal to establish such visas is to be considered by the Council of Home Affairs Ministers in Brussels tomorrow. It has been reported, rightly or wrongly, that the United Kingdom Home Office Minister will agree to it.

I appreciate that our powers are limited but, if a Select Committee says that we should debate this vital issue and if it issues a special report, is it not scandalous that there is to be a meeting in Brussels tomorrow to decide the issue, especially given the fact that many hon. Members—of, I think, all parties—believe that a common Euro-symbol visa is effectively the beginning of the end of border controls?

I therefore ask you, Madam Speaker, whether any step can be taken to ensure an emergency debate before tomorrow, so that the House may express an opinion. What is the point of having Select Committees to establish a unanimous opinion if we cannot discuss the issue, and if the Government are to go to Brussels tomorrow and agree to the proposal?

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Calm down, Teddy.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Although the hon. Gentleman may not think so, democracy matters a great deal. This country belongs to the people. *[Interruption.]*

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I hardly need further comments on a point of order that has been explained to the House very clearly and with which I can deal.

As the hon. Gentleman realises, the issue that he has raised has to do with the arrangement of business; it is not a matter for the Speaker. The arrangement of business is one of the responsibilities of the Leader of the House. I suggest that, as soon as he can, the hon. Gentleman attempts to raise the matter with him, to see whether there can be a change of business.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. There is no doubt that you are a doughty champion of the rights of the House. If my right hon. or hon. Friend goes to Brussels tomorrow and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

(Sir T. Taylor) said, stitches up an arrangement with other European Ministers, what can the House then do about it? What can you do to help the House today to sustain its position, powers and influence?

Madam Speaker: If I had received a request for a private notice question or for a debate under Standing Order No. 20 by midday today, there could perhaps have been changes in the business. The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) raised the issue, which is barely a point of order, with me at precisely 3.20 pm, 10 minutes before he raised it on the Floor of the House.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I did not know before.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may not have known before, but I cannot change the business of the House unless the proper procedures agreed by the House are followed at the correct time. Much as I might be sympathetic to what the hon. Gentleman and perhaps others are seeking to do, I have to uphold the procedures of the House.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. In case I appeared discourteous, I must point out that the letter was sent yesterday and arrived this morning, but that I received it only at 3.15 pm. The meeting is tomorrow; what the blazes are we to do?

Madam Speaker: I cannot give any account of Paddington Bear the postman or why, if the letter was posted yesterday, it was received only late today, as presumably it was posted in the same building. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has done his best to raise the matter, but I repeat that I have to follow the procedures of the House and cannot accept what he is saying at this stage. Had it been raised with me by midday, I could perhaps have done something about it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is Paddington Bear really Postman Pat?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member is always on the ball—I am very grateful.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had a request from the Secretary of State for Health for an opportunity to explain to us how it was that Leeds general infirmary proved to have the nearest bed for a brain-damaged patient in Kent?

The patient had to be flown by helicopter from Sussex to Leeds, necessitating a 12-hour delay in treatment following a road accident. After a seven-hour operation, his condition is clearly still critical. Has the Secretary of State asked for an opportunity to explain to us why more than half the country was without beds for a brain-damaged patient? Surely that represents a serious emergency nationally for the health service.

Madam Speaker: I have had no request from a Minister to make a statement on that or any other matter.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As the Home Secretary has been in his place and has heard the exchanges between several hon. Members and yourself, if, bearing in mind what has been said, he is anxious to make a statement to the House, perhaps at 7 o'clock, would you view such a request sympathetically?

Madam Speaker: I do not have to give sympathetic consideration to a statement. I am informed by the Minister concerned that he will make a statement. I have made this point to the House on several occasions. That is the procedure of the House. If a Minister wishes to make a statement at any time, I have to hear that statement.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Do you agree that if, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T,. Taylor) says, the letter was written yesterday and arrived today, bearing in mind that the Government may make a decision tomorrow and that the House will debate the matter at a later stage, that is a totally unacceptable situation? What powers do you have to force Ministers to take proper account of the wishes of the House, so that matters can be properly and publicly debated before the people of this country?

Madam Speaker: I have no powers whatever in that respect. If the House at some time wishes to give me such powers, that point may be considered by the Procedure Committee. At present, I have no powers or authority in that respect.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The delay from the time of publication of the report to the answer received points to the fact that the Government do not want a debate on the matter. Surely the House should not be manipulated by Ministers, who have ensured that there is no opportunity at the proper time in the House today to move that there be a change of business. I suggest that you should have some powers to inform the Government that this is totally unacceptable, and to defend the rights of Members of the House.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that we have had enough points of order now. The whole House understands what has taken place. All I can say is that there are Ministers on the Treasury Bench at present who have been here throughout the exchanges. I expect that those Ministers have taken note of the strong feelings in the House on the matter.

BILLS PRESENTED

Child Support

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mrs. Secretary Bottomley, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Redwood, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. John M. Taylor and Mr. Alistair Burt, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to child support maintenance and other maintenance; and to provide for a child maintenance bonus: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 71.]

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) (Scotland)

Mr. Gordon McMaster, supported by Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Adam Ingram,

Mrs. Irene Adams, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Thomas Graham, Mr. Norman Hogg, Mr. Michael J. Martin, Mr. Jimmy Wray and Dr. Norman A. Godman, presented a Bill to make it unlawful in Scotland to discriminate against disabled persons in respect of employment and in other circumstances, and to establish a Disability Rights Commission for Scotland; to make provision for access to polling stations and voting by disabled persons in Scotland; to place certain duties on local authorities, education authorities and other bodies in Scotland in relation to disabled persons; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 17 March, and to be printed. [Bill 73.]

Valuing Women's Unwaged Work

Ms Mildred Gordon, supported by Mr. Harry Cohen, Ms Tessa Jowell, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Alan Simpson, Ms Jean Corston, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mrs. Anne Campbell and Mrs. Irene Adams, presented a Bill to require government departments and other public bodies to include in the production of statistics relating to the gross domestic product and satellite accounts a calculation of the quantity and value of the unwaged work of women: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 14 July, and to be printed. [Bill 74.]

Taxis (Protection of Passengers)

Mrs. Jane Kennedy, supported by Ms Rachel Squire, Ms Glenda Jackson, Ms Ann Coffey, Ms Angela Eagle, Mr. Geoffrey Hoon, Mr. Kevin Hughes, Mr. Derek Enright, Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and Mr. Kevin Barron, presented a Bill to make it unlawful for any person who has been convicted of prescribed sexual offences or offences of violence against the person to drive any taxi, minicab or private hire vehicle; to place appropriate duties upon licensing authorities; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 24 March, and to be printed. [Bill 75.]

Tampons (Safety)

Ms Dawn Primarolo, supported by Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Ms Jean Corston, Ms Harriet Harman, Ms Clare Short, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mr. John Austin-Walker and Mr. David Hinchliffe, presented a Bill to make provision for tampon packaging and advertisements for tampons to carry certain warnings and information, and to require the Secretary of State to make regulations for these purposes; to lay upon the Secretary of State duties with respect to research into, and publicity for, tampons and health; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 28 April, and to be printed. [Bill 76.]

Domestic Violence

Ms Jean Corston, supported by Ms Clare Short, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Ms Glenda Jackson, Ms Angela Eagle, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Ms Joan Ruddock, Ms Diane Abbott, Mrs. Barbara Roche and Mrs. Alice Mahon, presented a Bill to place duties upon Her Majesty's Government both to undertake a publicity campaign to call public attention to the criminality of domestic violence and to the opportunities for redress, and to co-ordinate policy for refuge provision for victims of domestic violence: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 28 April, and to be printed. [Bill 77.]

Vegetarianism

3.43 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a national body to promote the health advantages of vegetarianism.

I declare my interests. I am the parliamentary adviser to the London Beekeepers Association, and I am a vegetarian. However, I am nobody's turnip. I came to vegetarianism fairly late in my somewhat dissolute life; it has been a journey of discovery. My decision was based partly on health grounds, and partly on animal welfare considerations.

I am, however, no food fascist. If people wish to eat meat and run the risk of dying a horrible, lingering, hormone-induced death after sprouting extra breasts and large amounts of hair, it is, of course, entirely up to them. I would not even hold such ill-advised people personally responsible for the appalling cruelty inflicted on countless millions of living creatures to satisfy the desire for meat. All I ask is that everyone should be fully aware of the consequences of their own habits and the healthy eating alternatives available.

I am just old enough to remember the second world war. Alas, I played no heroic part in that great struggle, but I note with some interest that, at the end of the war, because of rationing and constant advice from the Department of Health, the civilian population emerged healthier than ever before. "Dig for Victory" was a most apposite entreaty.

The Government campaign during the previous war should have been continued, because the greatest killer in our society is ignorance about our own bodies. Indeed, a quick look around the Chamber probably makes my point better than I can in these few words. I see overweight, under-exercised, stressed-out bodies, many of which are daily stuffed with cholesterol-rich food, nicotine and alcohol.

A Department of Health report published last week revealed that English men and women are getting fatter and smoking and drinking too much. Regrettably, in that respect we are very much in step with those we represent. Among those surveyed, it was felt that stress was adversely affecting people's health, and that many of them were clearly swallowing their anxieties in the type of food they ate. Stress, which probably affects most Members of Parliament, often leads to a poor dietary regime, which in turn leads to major health problems. The link between stress and a poor diet is undeniable.

"The Health of the Nation" urges the British population to increase their consumption of fruit, vegetables and fibre. All mention of meat products, especially red meat, is played down. Evidence from bodies such as the World Health Organisation points conclusively to the fact that a vegetarian diet closely matches healthy eating guidelines.

There is a mass of statistical evidence, especially from the United States of America, to prove that a vegetarian diet saves not only lives but vast amounts of money in fewer demands on health services. The total annual direct medical costs savings from avoiding meat and tobacco are estimated in the States to be as high as $80 billion a year.

Studies show that twice as many non-vegetarians as vegetarians have been hospitalised during the past year, and that the use of prescription drugs has also about doubled. Several other studies have shown that the prevalence of hypertension among vegetarians is about a third to a half of that of non-vegetarians, even when alcohol, tobacco and caffeinated beverage use is controlled.

Cancer, as we all know, is one of the western society's greatest killers. One in three Americans develop cancer each year, more than 1 million cases are reported and diagnosed each year, and medical costs total around $35 billion each year. According to the National Research Council, 30 to 60 per cent. of cancers are attributable to diet. A study in Germany found that vegetarian men faced less than half the risk of a cancer death, and vegetarian women about a 25 per cent. lower risk compared with non-vegetarians.

It is now accepted in all quarters that vegetarians suffer 30 per cent. less heart disease, which is the biggest killer in the United Kingdom, and 40 per cent. less cancer, which is the second biggest killer. There are fewer cases of vegetarians suffering from arthritis, diabetes, osteoporosis, kidney failure and so on—the list goes on and on.

A vegetarian is likely to save the national health service an average of £40,000 during a lifetime. Of all food poisoning cases, 95 per cent. occur in animal foods, and as a result, meat eaters suffer many more days off work because of food poisoning. An old joke in the east end is: "When the bottom has fallen out of your world, eat one of Harry's hamburgers and let the world fall out of your bottom". There are more than 2.5 million cases of salmonella, listeria and e-coli 157 each year. That represents an enormous real cost to what is left of British industry.

Not only do veggies live longer: they look better. Vegetarians are 10 per cent. leaner than omnivores. When omnivores kick the meat habit, they lose an average of 10 to 22 lb. Ministers should bear that in mind, given that a target has been set to reduce obesity in this country to no more than 6 per cent. in men and 8 per cent. in women by 2005.

Persuasive though the health reasons are, there are other reasons for vegetarianism, too. Meat production involves several serious environmental problems. Many of the most serious water pollution incidents reported to the National Rivers Authority every year are due to slurry and sewage from livestock, and slurry being spread on land contributes to acid rain. Moreover, livestock create the single largest source of methane emissions in the United Kingdom, adding to the greenhouse effect.

Meat production also uses far more fossil fuels than the production of fruit and vegetables. Although 85 per cent. of Britain's agricultural land is used for meat production, getting protein from meat is monstrously inefficient: 10 kg of vegetable protein fed to livestock will supply only 1 kg of meat protein, and while meat protein produced on 10 hectares of land will feed only two people, soya protein grown on the same area would feed 61 people.

Millions of people all over the world are dying of starvation, while the world feeds 38 per cent. of all crops to animals rather than to human beings, so as to produce meat, most of which is consumed in the industrialised countries. Add to that the impact of over-grazing, which produces deserts and deforestation, and the price of meat becomes too high for the world to pay.

The central question is: if vegetarianism is so good, how come everyone does not embrace it today? That question ignores the fact that 2,000 people a week are becoming vegetarians, with the fastest growth among teenagers—but even that increase is simply not enough. Part of the reason why it is not greater lies in the years of accumulated prejudice against vegetarianism—for example, the image of the veggie as a spotty nerd sporting a woolly hat, an anorak and socks worn under open-toed sandals—*[Interruption.]* How unlike myself, Madam Speaker.

Such a caricature is fast fading, but vegetarianism is still seen by those in authority as a mild form of eccentricity, to be pitied and patronised. The "real men eat meat" syndrome—*[Interruption.]*—characterised by those on the Government Benches, is still with us. That is all part of the myth carefully fostered by the meat industry—a powerful industry heavily backed by Government, with both resources and propaganda.

The Meat and Livestock Commission has a staff of about 600 and an annual budget of about £43 million, some £4 million of which comes direct from the Government. Compare that with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Information Bureau, run as one of the accounts of a public relations consultancy, which has a budget of about £130,000 and four staff paid by the PR firm.

In other words, in terms of ability to inform, to advertise and to influence, there is no contest. One has only to think of the £10 million campaign by the MLC, "Recipe for Love", or the £14 million spent on the "Meat to Live" campaign, to realise that the dice are loaded. Massive subsidies are handed out by the taxpayer to the meat-producing industry.

We need to redress this terrible imbalance, and the purpose of my Bill is to set up a fruit and vegetable commission funded by the industry and by Government, with the Government using some of the massive savings gained by the health service when a growing proportion of the population switches to vegetarianism.

A vital part of the work of that new commission would be public education. People in this country are poisoning themselves through ignorance, and the Government in part connive at that scandalous and eminently avoidable situation. My Bill would seek to alleviate that ignorance, and to promote a healthier and a happier nation.

3.53 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): As a partial vegetarian for many more years than the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), I must tell him that we do not need an extra publicly created body. Incidentally, I do not regard any of the characteristics that the hon. Gentleman attributed to vegetarians as applicable to me. He also said that listeria came from animals, whereas I thought that in general it came from cheese.

If the hon. Gentleman wants a public body to promote fruit and vegetables, why does he not give that as an extra responsibility to the Covent Garden market authority, which already exists? He claimed that one in three Americans develops cancer each year—but that would mean 80 million people a year, and I do not believe that figure.

Mr. Tony Banks: During their lifetime.

Mr. Bottomley: That may be so, but that is not what the hon. Gentleman said.

If we imagine that, in just one part of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland, in which there are 35,000 farmers, one third of them full-time—all farmers had to turn all their fields to set-aside, we should discover what the land could and would look like without the farmers.

As a final point, I would say to those who like the look of sheep and cows in the fields that one cannot have livestock without dead stock. I recommend that people make up their own minds about what they eat and supply, and the House ought to send the hon. Gentleman off to Covent Garden today.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No.19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 95, Noes 66.

Division No. 97] **[3.54 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Berry, Roger
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Coffey, Ann
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gordon, Mildred
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hutton, John
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Pearson, Ian
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Randel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jean Corston and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

NOES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Fishburn, Dudley
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Gallie, Phil
Gill, Christopher
Godsiff, Roger
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hendry, Charles
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sims, Roger
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Sweeney, Walter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Bill Etherington, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Mr. Chris Mullin and Mr. Alan Simpson.

VEGETARIANISM

Mr. Tony Banks accordingly presented a Bill to establish a national body to promote the health advantages of vegetarianism: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 April, and to be printed. [Bill 78.]

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

4.6 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 2nd March, be approved.

At the beginning of last year's debate, I said that successive Home Secretaries had looked forward to the time when they would no longer have to come to the House to argue for the continuation of the exceptional powers first introduced in 1974. I also noted that, for most of the intervening 20 years, that had been very much a hope rather than an expectation. By the time that I came to wind up our short debate last year, the IRA had reinforced the point by launching a number of mortar bombs at Heathrow airport, thereby endangering the lives of many people from this country and overseas.

For nearly six months after that debate, terrorist activity continued at a high level in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. A further five members of the security forces were killed in Northern Ireland, and a further 96 were injured. On this side of the Irish sea, it was only the skilful interception at Heysham on 12 July of a trailer containing a two-tonne bomb that prevented untold destruction in one of our towns or cities.

Nine days later, a bag containing explosives and other bomb-making material was denied to terrorists only when a passenger on an Oxford-Reading train removed it in the hope that it might contain something more valuable.

As recently as 13 August, the IRA planted two bicycle bombs: one in Brighton, which was safely defused; and the other a device outside Woolworth's in a busy shopping street in Bognor. It was pure good fortune that the Bognor device, and the subsequent bomb found on 22 August in a litter bin outside Laura Ashley in Regent Street, did not produce the same tragic consequences as the two explosions in Bridge street, Warrington.

Since then, the IRA cessation of violence and the subsequent loyalist ceasefire have transformed the situation. For the first time for many years, the people of Northern Ireland can go about their daily business without fear of violence from republican or loyalist paramilitaries. For the first time for many years, the imminent threat of IRA violence in the towns and cities of Great Britain has receded.

The Government have done, and will continue to do, everything in their power to consolidate the ceasefire into a lasting peace. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 21 October that we were prepared to make a working assumption that the cessation was intended to be permanent and, accordingly, exploratory dialogue began between officials and representatives of Sinn Fein on 9 December. Shortly afterwards, exploratory dialogue with so-called loyalist groups began. Both sets of dialogue continue.

It remains the Government's earnest hope that those who have previously supported the use of violence to advance their cause can be brought fully and irrevocably

within the political process. That of course means that there needs to be substantial progress on the issue of decommissioning arms and explosives.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Has my right hon. and learned Friend read the extraordinary report that Mr. Adams and various IRA people are bringing a case in the European Court to claim vast sums of damages for being excluded from this country? Is he aware that that has caused outrage among my constituents, and no doubt many other people, who feel that it would be monstrous if huge sums of the taxpayer's money were extracted by those people, after all the misery and suffering that they have caused for years? Can my right hon. and learned Friend give us some reassurance about that?

Mr. Howard: I can understand the outrage to which my hon. Friend refers. The case was brought in the courts of the United Kingdom. It has been referred, on a point of law, to the European Court of Justice. Reports that the European Commission has made representations in support of the Adams claim are inaccurate. There is an exception in the provisions in the European treaty for free movement of people, for purposes of maintaining security, and I therefore do not share the opinions that have been expressed, in the newspaper reports to which my hon. Friend referred, about the likely outcome of that case.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose—*

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway).

Mr. John Greenway: The speech of my right hon. and learned Friend thus far and the most recent intervention have been about terrorism emanating from Ireland, and possibly from Northern Ireland, spreading into the rest of the United Kingdom. Does he agree, however, that there is great anxiety about the terrorist threat from outside the United Kingdom in respect of other matters?

Is it not the case that the two outrages in the past year, which have involved the serious injury of no less than 18 people, were not the work of the IRA but of an entirely different terrorist threat? In York and Harrogate, no less than five incendiary devices were activated, which were believed to be the work of the animal rights movement.

Obviously, we need those powers, regardless of the continuing peace process in Northern Ireland, which of course we all want.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the continuing danger from terrorism, quite apart from Northern Irish terrorism. I agree that we shall certainly need powers to tackle terrorism on a permanent basis. Whether they would need to be precisely the same powers that we have needed in the past 20 years is a matter that falls for consideration. When the appropriate time has been reached, that matter will be given the consideration that it deserves.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We have been speaking about exclusion orders as well, and we have noticed that there is to be a lifting of exclusion orders as Her Majesty's Government seek to respond to what is happening. Does the Home Secretary agree that, although the Ulster Unionist party has disagreed with the concept of temporary exile within the United Kingdom, the IRA-Sinn Fein have not lifted any of the exclusion orders that they have imposed on the people that they have expelled from their homes—never mind the hundreds that they have expelled from earth?

Mr. Howard: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and let me give him an assurance. The decisions that have been taken about individual exclusion orders by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and those decisions that I have taken, which I shall explain to the House in a moment or two, have been taken on security grounds, and on no other grounds, and will continue to be taken on precisely that basis, and that basis alone.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), and then I must make progress.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give the House an assurance that, irrespective of what any European Court says about Mr. Adams and his allegation that he has lost his rights by being denied entry, this Government, our Government, my Government, will take no notice, will flatly refuse to recognise his so-called rights and flatly refuse to pay him, or any of his ilk, any money at all?

Mr. Howard: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall never authorise any payment of damages as a result of that case.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I must make progress.

The publication of the "Framework for the Future" document means that there is now a comprehensive set of ideas to stimulate political dialogue among parties committed to constitutional methods. But the subject of today's debate is not the political process as such, but its implications for the future of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. In particular, I wish to explain to the House why, more than six months after the start of the IRA ceasefire, the Government are seeking the continuation of the Act in its entirety for a further 12 months.

Our position since 31 August has been characterised by two complementary responses. As threat levels have reduced and the immediate prospect of terrorist violence has receded, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I have kept in close contact with our security advisers and have agreed to the lifting of restrictions which have no longer seemed justified in the new situation.

The broadcasting restrictions against Sinn Fein were lifted last September. In October, all the remaining closure orders on border roads in Northern Ireland were rescinded, and the exclusion orders against Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were revoked. Since then, the presence of the Army on the streets of Northern Ireland has been greatly reduced and the Metropolitan and City

[Mr. Howard]

police have been able to scale down the high-profile armed patrols which they had been operating in central London.

But we are not prepared to do anything which would expose the people of our country to unnecessary risk. The troubles of the past 25 years have claimed the lives of more than 3,000 people and have injured many more. It would in our view be wholly irresponsible to dismantle our defences while the paramilitary organisations remain intact, while they continue to carry out brutal punishment beatings, while their command structures, weapons and explosives remain in place, and while they retain the capability to resume violence at very short notice.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On the point about dismantling our security apparatus, will the Home Secretary comment on the words of the late Lord Diplock, delivered more than 20 years ago, about dealing with cases involving the security forces? He said:

"the jury . . . should remind themselves that the postulated balancing of risk against risk . . . is not undertaken in the calm analytical atmosphere of the court-room . . . but in the brief second or two which the accused had to decide whether to shoot or not and under all the stresses to which he was exposed".

Does the Home Secretary agree that, in considering cases such as that of Clegg and the two guardsmen, judges should think about those words very carefully?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend knows that I am unable to comment on particular cases. However, I agree entirely with the generality of the quotation by Lord Diplock.

Mr. Madden: Will the Home Secretary tell the House how often he has visited Northern Ireland since 31 August, how many community and political groups he has met, and how many of those groups have urged him to renew today's legislation? I have paid two such visits to Northern Ireland—the most recent of which was last week—and all the political groups there, Unionist and republican, emphasised the fact that the suspension of the exclusion and detention powers would greatly reinforce the peace process. Why does the Home Secretary disagree with them?

Mr. Howard: I have no doubt that we shall hear from the political representatives of the people of Northern Ireland in due course during the debate.

The hon. Gentleman stretches the credulity of the House if he suggests that it would be more sensible for the House to base its judgments on his reports—after two visits to Northern Ireland—than on the very careful examination of the question which was undertaken by Mr. John Rowe, to whose report I am about to come. He undertook extensive consultation in Northern Ireland, he talked to many people, and he reached a clear view about the necessity of the provisions.

I have not been to Northern Ireland since 30 August, but those members of the Government who have direct responsibility for Northern Ireland are there day after day, and they are in an excellent position—a position infinitely superior to that of the hon. Gentleman on the basis of his two visits—to form a view.

Against the background to which I have referred, let me return to the specific provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and explain why we believe it would be premature to allow any of its provisions to lapse.

First, we have given proper weight to the conclusions reached by Mr. John Rowe QC, who has carried out the customary annual review of the legislation. I am sure that members of all parties will want to record their thanks to Mr. Rowe for a thorough report, produced in the light of very widespread consultations.

Mr. Rowe's clear conclusion, reached at the end of an entirely independent scrutiny, was that the Act should now be renewed in its entirety for a further 12 months. He recognised that the moment might come when one or more provisions of the legislation would no longer be necessary, and he rightly observed that the making of this order would not rule out the possibility of change during the next 12 months. An order can be made under section 27 of the Act at any time to discontinue specific provisions of the Act, and he recommended that the Government should keep that possibility in mind.

That was Mr. Rowe's recommendation. In explaining why the Government have decided to accept it, I want to deal particularly with the powers of detention and exclusion, which remain the most exceptional features of the legislation. I also intend to say something about the longer-term future of the legislation, if, as we all hope, the present cessation leads to a lasting peace.

First, there are two aspects to the continuing need for the powers. Since 1984, a substantial part of the legislation has been available for use, in respect of not only Northern Irish terrorism but international terrorism. I need hardly remind the House that the single most devastating terrorist crime in this country was not an act of Irish terrorism, but the Lockerbie air disaster, in which no fewer than 270 people were killed.

Since then, the threat to this country from international terrorism has not gone away. The car bombs outside the Israeli embassy and Balfour house last July were a reminder of the particular vulnerability of the Jewish community. The Iranian fatwa against Salman Rushdie remains in force, and, with the growth of Islamic radicalism, we need to remain vigilant against the possibility that Britain will be used as a base for plotting acts of violence overseas and raising money for terrorist purposes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In what way would the prevention of terrorism legislation that we are considering have done anything about Lockerbie? If the Government want the truth about Lockerbie, they had better talk seriously to the intelligence community, to Sir Peter Marychurch, Sir Colin Figures, American intelligence, Sir Charles Powell and, yes, the former Prime Minister.

Mr. Howard: I know of the hon. Gentleman's long interest in Lockerbie and all its ramifications, and I hope he will forgive me if I do not follow him down those byways today.

It is no part of the Government's case that this legislation is the only, or even the primary, weapon in our armoury against international terrorism. The Immigration Acts and the general provisions of the criminal law have a crucial part to play. But if the Prevention of Terrorism Act were simply swept away without any thought to what might need to go in its place, we would undoubtedly be making the job of the police much more difficult.

We are not dealing here merely with theoretical possibilities. The recent charges in connection with last July's bombings followed arrests under section 14 of the legislation and extensions for 48 hours beyond the initial two days' detention.

Secondly, the Government agree with Mr. Rowe that it is too early yet to conclude that parts of the legislation are no longer needed in connection with Northern Irish terrorism. Let me take in turn the two key powers of detention and exclusion.

As a result of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Brogan, there is already a difference in the way in which the powers of detention operate between international terrorism and Northern Irish terrorism. The Act allows the police to detain suspects for up to 48 hours on their own authority, and up to a maximum of five days beyond that on my authority or that of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Scotland.

In the light of the Brogan case, however, we gave an assurance that, in international terrorism cases, the period of extension would not exceed 48 hours. We are satisfied that our practice in such cases is already fully consistent with the requirements of the European convention on human rights.

We concluded that we could not sensibly agree to a similar restriction in Northern Irish terrorism cases, given the exceptional risks posed to the security of this country. We therefore made a specific, narrowly drawn derogation from the convention to enable us to retain executive extensions of detention for a maximum of five days. The validity of that derogation was subsequently upheld by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Brannigan and McBride.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): This is what worries many of us who oppose parts of the Act. If people can be detained for seven days and nights, it will be possible to get anyone to confess to anything during that time. Does that concern the Home Secretary?

Mr. Howard: If there were any substance in the hon. Gentleman's allegation, it might indeed concern me. I must tell him, however, that the history of some of the questioning that has taken place during extended periods of detention gives the lie to his assertion.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The point, surely, is not the length of the period of detention. Is it not a fact that, in perfect conformity with the European convention, those responsible for the Eksund activities were detained by the French authorities for two years, but it was the authority of a judicial officer that enabled them to be detained in that way? The idea that anyone detained for more than seven days will confess to anything does not accord with the European convention.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. It is always essential to keep in mind the distinction between form and substance.

We have continued to keep the need for the derogation under review, and have considered the matter again in the light of the ceasefire. In the first eight months of last year, there were 377 extensions of detention throughout the United Kingdom, the overwhelming majority in Northern Ireland. In the more than six months since then, there have been just 18 extensions, five of them related to international terrorism.

The periods of detention have tended to decrease; the only instance in which detention has exceeded four days since the ceasefire involved the complex investigation of the Newry post office murder.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I wonder about the Home Secretary's figures. Page 1 of the "Home Office Statistical Bulletin" clearly tells us that 61 people were detained in Great Britain in 1994 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and that all but one were detained in connection with Northern Irish terrorism. If I heard him aright, the Home Secretary said that five people had been detained in relation to international terrorism. Is the Home Secretary right, or is the statistical bulletin right?

Mr. Howard: I think the hon. Gentleman will find that we are talking about different periods of time. I was talking about the period leading up to the ceasefire and the period since then.

Provided that the ceasefire holds, there is every reason to believe that the number of cases in which the police will need to seek extensions of detention will be very small, and the number of occasions on which they request extensions of more than 48 hours smaller still. However, as the Newry incident illustrates, it is too early for us to be satisfied that these powers could be suspended, or our limited derogation from the European convention on human rights withdrawn.

The Northern Ireland paramilitary groups retain the capability to resume their attacks at very short notice, and investigations into past crimes continue on both sides of the Irish sea. The Government accept the view of the police that it would be wrong at this early stage to withdraw any of their existing powers of arrest and detention.

In chapters 5 and 7 of his report, Mr. Rowe analyses the arguments for giving the judiciary responsibility for determining both extensions of detention and exclusion orders. His conclusion is that these processes are properly executive in character and that a judge would

"be exercising a function which could be called judicial only because he happens to be a judge by occupation."

That point was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King).

This issue has been extensively debated in the past, and I do not intend to say more about it now, except that, while the need for these temporary provisions remains, we do not believe that it would be right or practicable to introduce an innovation that has been consistently rejected by all those who have taken an independent look at the legislation since 1974, at the invitation of successive Governments.

Exclusion has always been the most difficult part of the legislation, particularly for those of us who are proud to call ourselves unionists. Since the House first debated these provisions in 1974, there have always been some who, while wholly supportive of other parts of the legislation, have had misgivings about denying British citizens access to part of their own country.

[Mr. Howard]

I understand and sympathise with those concerns, but when faced with a determined terrorist assault on our most fundamental human rights, we have had, reluctantly, to countenance some measures which in more normal times would not be acceptable.

At the time of the debate a year ago, there were 80 exclusion orders in force, nine made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and 71 by me or my predecessors. By the time of the IRA ceasefire, the figure of 80 had reduced to 74. Since then, my right hon. and learned Friend and I have reviewed the case for each of the remaining orders in the light of the assessment of our security advisers.

My right hon. and learned Friend was able to conclude last month that all his remaining orders should be lifted. On 17 February, I announced that, with the help of the Metropolitan police, the RUC and the security service, I was considering all the 56 orders for which I was responsible. I have now revoked a further 16. There are now just 40 orders in force.

I have considered whether it would be possible to go further and lift all the remaining orders. I have not done so, for two reasons. First, it is clear that, if the ceasefires were to break down, we might receive very little, if any, warning, and without doubt many of the key targets would, as before, be on this side of the water. Secondly, the police remain satisfied that among those still excluded are some who would be likely to play some part in mainland terrorism were it to resume.

I welcome the shift in the position of the Labour party on exclusion orders. Last year, the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), speaking from the Front Bench, described exclusion orders as an example of internal exile of a kind previously practised in this century only by Stalin, Mussolini and Franco. In a radio interview this morning, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said that, although he dislikes exclusion orders, he accepts that I should be able to reactivate them with 24 hours notice if the ceasefires were to break down.

What the hon. Member for Blackburn overlooks is that, if all exclusion orders were to be lifted now, there would be nothing to stop those people coming here well before any possible breakdown of the ceasefire, to make preparations for renewed attacks. That is not a debating point. It is a point that goes to the heart of the exercise of these powers in the cause of protecting the safety of our people.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will deal with that point in the course of his speech. For my part, I shall continue to keep the need for each of the orders under review, but I am not prepared to take unnecessary risks at this stage, in the face of the clear view of the police and our other security advisers.

Let me finally say something about the way forward. The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 are explicitly temporary pieces of legislation, and it has always been the Government's position that exceptional powers should not be retained any longer than necessary.

There are therefore two questions that will need to be addressed if, as we all hope, the ceasefires continue to hold. First, how long will some or all of these exceptional powers need to be maintained, whether in force or in reserve? Secondly, even in the longer term, will there be a need for some specific, permanent counter terrorism legislation in the light of the continuing threat from international terrorism?

On the first, the Government whole-heartedly accept Mr. Rowe's recommendation that they should keep the need for the existing powers under close review. If the moment comes when one or more of them could be discontinued, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or I can lay the necessary order under this Act or the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 at any time.

Moreover, Mr. Rowe's regular reviews provide a wholly independent assessment of whether the time has come for changes to be made. His PTA report is before the House, and he is now embarking on his separate, annual review of the Northern Ireland legislation, which the House will have the opportunity to debate in about three months. In addition, the House will need to consider next Session what to do before the emergency provisions Act reaches the end of its statutory life in August 1996.

The second question—what permanent counter-terrorism legislation, if any, might be needed if a lasting peace is established in Northern Ireland—is one on which the Government have an open mind. At the right moment, there would need to be a wide-ranging look at all the options. There are a number of ways in which that could be done, but we are persuaded that it would be premature at this stage to try to address these longer term issues. The priority for now is to make much further progress down the road of securing a lasting peace.

There is a better chance now than at any time in the past 21 years that an end may soon be in sight to this long series of annual debates. But the prospects remain uncertain. It is the Government's unshakeable conviction that we must not lower our guard until we can be satisfied that Northern Irish terrorism is really at an end.

If, as we earnestly hope, that day comes, it will be in no small measure due to the skill and fortitude which the police and security forces have shown down the years, fortified by the exceptional powers entrusted to them under this legislation. I pay tribute to them for their work, for which we are all enormously indebted to them. I commend the order to the House.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At 23 minutes past 4, according to the Chamber clock, it was the Home Secretary and not I who brought into the debate the subject of Lockerbie. Does he not owe it to his colleagues at least to explain what relevance the measures that we are discussing have to the Lockerbie bombing?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I was not in the Chair at the time. I am quite sure that, if Madam Speaker had thought that there was anything amiss, she would have drawn it to the attention of the House.

4.37 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Terrorism is a scourge of far too many societies across the world. It can be an especial cancer for countries that aspire to be democratic, because the measures that are sometimes necessary in a democracy to fight terrorism and reduce terrorist acts can collide with some of the most important features of those

democracies, such as the liberty of the subject before the law and the paramount need for an independent and transparent system of justice that applies equally to all.

Every hon. Member shares a complete abhorrence of terrorism and a desire to see it eradicated from all parts of the United Kingdom. It is the Opposition's fervent hope that there should be bipartisan agreement on the measures that are necessary to defeat terrorism. Unfortunately, such bipartisan agreement has proved no easier to achieve this year than last, but our endeavours to obtain such an agreement will continue beyond tonight's vote.

We all owe a particular debt to those in the police and armed forces and in the security and intelligence services for their dedication and for their daily risks. Many of them have paid with their lives in the fight against terrorism, from whatever source. In opening the debate for the Opposition this time last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who is now the leader of the Opposition, said:

"It is not in dispute, and never has been, that we need anti-terrorist legislation. It is not in dispute that the powers . . . of detention"—

of terrorist suspects—

"should remain."

My right hon. Friend also supported the continuance of the proscription of terrorist organisations and the

"attachment of terrorist funds."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 300.]

Last week in a Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, and this Monday on the Floor of the House, the Opposition approved without a Division an order made under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 in respect of international terrorism. Three things, however, are in dispute: the power to make exclusion orders, which are a form of internal exile; the absence of a judicial element in decisions to extend detention; and, above all and especially important at this time, the need for a general and comprehensive review of anti-terrorist legislation.

Had such a review been announced, and had it been able to take into account our concerns in relation to the first two matters that I raised, we should not have voted against the order tonight, but the renewal of the Act comes before the House in a single, take-it-or-leave-it order that the House cannot amend. In those circumstances, and as we have been unable to make progress on any of the matters that I have specified, a parliamentary committee of the Labour party had no alternative but to advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the order.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I understand and share some of the hon. Gentleman's reservations, but would he give the same advice to his right hon. and hon. Friends if he believed that they would win the vote tonight?

Mr. Straw: If I believed that we would win the vote, we would be in government and the question would not arise. I have dealt with the point. This is a take-it-or-leave-it order. A Division is the only way in which the Labour party can put on record its serious reservations about the way in which the Government have responded to its proposals.

Although the Act to which the order directly relates was passed in 1989, legislation to counter terrorism was first introduced by the then Labour Government in November 1974, four days after the Birmingham pub bombings. That measure passed through all its stages in the House and in the other place in the near record time of 48 hours. There was unanimity on the need for that legislation to deal with what the then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins described as a "wholly exceptional situation" and a "clear and present danger", but, equally, there was wide understanding of the enormity of what the House was doing.

Roy Jenkins, now Lord Jenkins, described the provisions as "draconian" and said that they were "unprecedented in peacetime". Parliament has rightly determined that the use of and justification for such powers must, in consequence, be kept under continual review. Powers were therefore laid down requiring what amounted to annual audits of the exclusion and detention orders made under the Act.

In recent years, those audits have been carried out by John Rowe. From time to time, wider, more fundamental reviews of the merits and future use of those powers have been undertaken by distinguished figures in public life such as Lords Gardiner and Shackleton in the 1970s and Viscount Colville in 1987. Each of those wider reviews re-emphasised the intention that those powers should be temporary. The Secretary of State referred to that earlier when he said that the measures were explicitly temporary.

In his 1975 report, Lord Gardiner said that the continued existence of these powers should be

"limited both in scope and duration".

In 1978, Lord Shackleton said:

"It would be highly regrettable if the view were to gain ground that these powers should in some way slide into part of our permanent legislation. I do not think that they should."

Today, the Home Secretary echoed the same point that he made this time last year, when he said that, since 1974,

"it has been the hope of successive Home Secretaries that the day would come when the circumstances which made these exceptional powers necessary would cease to exist".

He went on to say:

"for most of the past 20 years, that has been very much a hope rather than an expectation."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 292.]

Of course, he was right in his opening remarks today to refer to the continuing terrorist outrages that took place on the day of the debate this time last year right up until the IRA ceasefire in August; but, in the 12 months since that statement in 1994, something exceptional and remarkable has happened. Thanks to the extraordinary tenacity first of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and then of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), and thanks to the commitment, to which we pay tribute again, of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and the determination of all the communities in the Province, effectively there has been a peace, however temporary, since the IRA ceasefire in August. For the first time in 25 years, people in Northern Ireland are enjoying something of the normality of life that we in Britain have taken for granted.

I hope that no hon. Member is sufficiently naive to assert that the situation in the north of Ireland is so stable that lasting peace is now a certainty. Of course that is not the case, and of course it is a fact of life that the paramilitary organisations in both communities remain intact and have the same access to arms and explosives as they had before the ceasefires came into effect. Now is not the moment for complacency; but, to pick up the

[Mr. Straw]

phrase used by the Home Secretary last year, as the distant "hope" of peace has been replaced by a clear "expectation" of peace, in our judgment now is the time to establish a comprehensive and fundamental review of the future need for prevention of terrorism measures.

The review should be conducted on the basis, to use the words of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, of the

"Government's working assumption that the ceasefires are intended to be permanent."

The review would be established to consider in the changed circumstances and on the Government's working assumption the need generally for there to be anti-terrorism measures on the statute book and the extent to which it was desirable or practical to include some of them in the general law on police powers and criminal procedures.

We would wish the review to consider, among other things, issues of concern relating to exclusion orders and decisions on the extension of detention. We proposed that the review should be conducted by a High Court judge or someone of similar standing and that the process of the review should be as open as possible, given the subject matter.

As I believe the House is aware, we pressed the case for such a review with Ministers well in advance of today's debate. We believe that in this area, more than almost any other, it is far preferable for matters to be treated on an all-party basis, and, as I said, had such a review been accepted, we would not divide the House tonight.

The Secretary of State's response to our proposals for a review has fallen into two parts, as I observed during a number of interviews that he and I have given. On the one hand, in an interview earlier this morning, the Secretary of State appeared to claim that the J. J. Rowe review into the operation of the Act in 1994 had already met our request but, on the other hand, he appeared to concede our case for a separate and much more fundamental review, as he did a moment ago, but with the caveat that it should not occur yet. Let me deal with those two points in turn.

There has, in fact, always been the clearest distinction between the kind of fundamental review that is now needed, and which was carried out in the past by Lord Shackleton, Viscount Colville and Lord Gardiner, and the annual reviews now carried out by Mr. Rowe. As Mr. Rowe concedes in the opening paragraph of his report, the review examines the operation of the Act in 1994. Although he considers whether there is a need for the Act to continue, he reaches his conclusion exclusively on the basis of how the Act has operated in the past, not on the circumstances in which it might operate in the future.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that the House had to

"take full account of the new situation"—[*Official Report*, 17 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. *833-34*.]

which the ceasefires have created; but Mr. Rowe said that, in making his judgment, he took account of the new situation. He said in paragraphs 2 and 3 of his report:

"I cannot have regard to such things . . . I am not part of the peace process".

However, no fundamental review of the kind that we seek could conceivably do its work unless it did take account of the facts and the reality of the peace process.

The issue of human rights is central to the argument in a democracy about the use of anti-terrorist powers which involve a specific dilution of an individual's human rights. Mr. Rowe says that he "should have regard" to human rights which, he said, he kept "in mind", but he draws his readers' attention specifically to the absence of human rights considerations in his formal terms of reference. However, no fundamental review could possibly exclude such consideration from its terms of reference, because issues of human rights are at the heart of any fundamental review.

Mr. Dicks: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that rights and obligations are two sides of the same coin? If we take a certain Mr. Gerry Adams, how can we be concerned about his so-called "right" to come into this country when he has refused to accept his obligations to the rest of society? The hon. Gentleman cannot talk about rights without accepting that obligations go alongside them.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is, of course, correct to say that rights are balanced by duties. It is a fact of life with which the House and Ministers have had to wrestle since the IRA bombing campaign here in the early 1970s and just before that in Northern Ireland. The basic liberties that we take for granted have been assaulted by terrorist operations. I accepted and acknowledged that in opening my speech. Of course we take account of that. We also, however, have to recognise—this point was made extremely eloquently in Viscount Colville's fundamental review in 1987—that, if we stoop to the level of the terrorist and abandon altogether those fundamental liberties, we have lost the battle against terrorism.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): The hon. Gentleman may, inadvertently, have done an injustice to Mr. Rowe. The hon. Gentleman said that Mr. Rowe did not take into account the changed circumstances. I draw his attention to paragraph 15 on page 7, where Mr. Rowe makes that very point.

Mr. Straw: Indeed; the hon. Gentleman may draw my attention to paragraph 15 because I was coming on to deal with exactly that. I hope that I have done every justice to Mr. Rowe's report, because no purpose is served by seeking to alter the sense of what he said.

In one interview this morning, on breakfast television, the Secretary of State sought to elevate the Rowe review by saying that I had given evidence to it. The implication was that this turned the Rowe review into the fundamental review that the Labour party had sought. Would that that were the case! It is perfectly true, as Mr. Rowe records in the appendix to his report, that he separately saw my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) and me.

However, those meetings were informal conversations. In no sense were they formal meetings to take detailed and forensic evidence about the future need for this legislation. Moreover, they took place when Mr. Rowe completed his report. I saw him on 31 January and my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar saw him on 2 February. Mr. Rowe formally submitted his report to the Secretary of State on 3 February, the very next day.

To deal directly with the point raised by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), in paragraph 2 of the Rowe report, Mr. Rowe wholly detaches himself from the peace process. He says:

"I am not part of the peace process: I not a member of the Government"—

quite right!—

"I am not bound by any Government policy."

In paragraph 15, however, he makes an important concession to the reality of the peace process and to our argument. As we have heard from the Secretary of State, Mr. Rowe says that, although the whole of the prevention of terrorism Act is needed now,

"I do not ignore the facts of the ceasefire or the talks, and if events occur so that one or more provisions of the PTA is no longer necessary, section 27(6)(b)"—

which allows provisions to be put into cold storage, as we have heard—

"can be used . . . the Government should keep this section in mind during the coming year."

I said a moment ago that the response by the Secretary of State to our calls for a review was to claim at first that the Rowe review was sufficient. Twenty minutes later on the "Today" programme, and again in the House this afternoon, the Secretary of State said something very different, implicitly acknowledging that the Rowe review was not the same thing as a fundamental review. On the "Today" programme he said that, although he hoped that the ceasefire would be permanent, we would still need some anti-terrorist powers, an issue that is not in dispute across the Floor of the House. He said that we faced dangers from international terrorism; of course we do. He then said:

"I accept that in that situation there will be a need to look very carefully and to have a review as to what powers we will continue to need for the long term."

That is exactly our case for a fundamental review. However, the Secretary of State finished by saying:

"But we are not at that point yet."

There we have it. The Secretary of State accepts the need for a long-term review. He said earlier this afternoon that we needed a wide-ranging look at all the issues and that he did not consider Rowe to have provided that. The only issue is one of timing. The view of the Secretary of State is, yes, there should be an independent review, but not yet.

I simply do not understand his argument. There were two fundamental reviews in the 1970s and one in the 1980s, despite the fact that the overall security situation remained unchanged and dangerous. However, there has been no fundamental review since Lord Colville's in 1987. Even if there were no ceasefire, a fundamental review would have been well overdue. Indeed, that point was made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition this time last year. With the facts of the ceasefire, the case for the establishment of a fundamental review seems to us to be unanswerable and overwhelming.

As I have repeatedly made clear, Labour Members do not, of course, say that, pending the outcome of the review, the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act as a whole should be put on ice; rather, we say that, on the working assumption of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that the ceasefires will turn out to be permanent, the review's recommendations should be available to Ministers and to Parliament to coincide with the time, which we all hope will come, when it is judged that peace in Northern Ireland is permanent.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle) *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a second.

The Secretary of State made some heavy weather of there being no question meanwhile of dismantling the security apparatus. There is no question on the Labour Benches either of dismantling the security apparatus.

Mr. Howard *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the Secretary of State and then to his hon. Friend.

Mr. Howard: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's somewhat convoluted argument, but I am having considerable difficulty in doing so. The hon. Gentleman concedes that lasting peace is not a certainty. There is a difference between us as to when there should be the fundamental review to which he referred, but the House is concerned with whether these powers should be renewed now, in the existing situation. If the hon. Gentleman accepts the uncertainty and if, as he said a moment ago, the existing security apparatus with the powers that sustain it should not be dismantled, why cannot he agree with Mr. Rowe, who said that the whole Act is needed now? Why cannot he agree with the Government, and why cannot his party vote with us in the Lobby this evening?

Mr. Straw: By his attitude, the Secretary of State has just explained the reason. He knows that we sought a bipartisan agreement, not on the suspension of the powers but on the establishment of a fundamental review. We had no interest in playing party politics on this issue. I hope and believe that the Secretary of State does not either. It is interesting, however, that, for the first time in my recollection, he has used the term and acknowledged the need for a fundamental review.

I dealt with the issue of the vote in my opening remarks and in answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). This is a take-it-or-leave-it order. The only way in which we can express not only our opposition to exclusion orders as they currently operate and the fact that the Secretary of State, as I shall explain, is unwilling to suspend their future use, but our reservations about the decisions on the extension of detention and, above all, the Secretary of State's failure, which I continue to fail to understand, to establish a fundamental review which will be without prejudice to the operation of those powers, is by voting against the order.

Mr. Howard *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) and then come back to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Day: I find it difficult to accept that the hon. Gentleman mentions that in future we may recognise a permanent peace. Does he agree that the only real sign of a permanent peace is when terrorists hand over their weapons and that, until then, there cannot be real peace, only the hope of it? Given that scenario and the fact that we certainly cannot describe the present situation as permanent peace, why will not the hon. Gentleman ensure

[Mr. Day]

that the powers to contain the threat of a return to terrorism are available to the Government of the day if they needed them?

Mr. Straw: I have just dealt with that. As the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was explaining, I think yesterday, the issue of how one judges a permanent peace is slightly more complicated than the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying—I hope that I understand it correctly—that the only issue between him and the Government is the timing, and perhaps the nature, of the review. He also complains that the order is a take-it-or-leave-it order, but there is absolutely nothing in it about a review. So if the only difference between the hon. Gentleman and the Government is the review, why does he not vote for the order, which provides the powers that the police, the security service and Mr. Rowe say are needed if we are to keep up our guard?

Mr. Straw: That is about the poorest argument I have ever heard the Secretary of State come out with. I have answered it once already, but I am happy to answer it again. This is a take-it-or-leave-it order, and our concerns should come as no surprise to the Home Secretary because he has known of them for several weeks. If he is anxious to assist us not to vote against the order, he could bring forward what, from what he has let slip this afternoon, is evidently in his mind—the fundamental review, which I suspect he will announce in a shorter rather than a longer time.

I shall now deal with two specific issues that concern us—exclusion orders and extensions of detention. I welcome the Home Secretary's revoking of the 16 exclusion orders. One of the reasons why we believe that a fundamental review is necessary is that, the last time the case for them was examined in such a review, by Lord Colville in 1987, he found that case wholly wanting.

I have given the matter as much attention as I can, and I acknowledge the strong views of those directly involved in the fight against terrorism about the need to maintain exclusion orders. I think that the Home Secretary will accept, however, that those views can never be overriding. Politicians, such as Ministers and Members of the House, must make wider judgments.

Lord Colville looked most carefully at the balance to be struck between the practical case for exclusion orders made by people in the security forces, and such orders' collision with basic liberties. He said:

"This power is the most draconian in the present Act. It is only applicable to Irish terrorism".

Lord Colville had previously explained:

"I have to agree that it is probably an effective way of getting rid of people from an area where otherwise they might cause great trouble; that it disrupts terrorist lines of communication and supply of arms, ammunition and explosives. However I am not convinced that the ends justify these means. I renew my recommendation . . . that Part II of the Act relating to exclusion orders should not be renewed . . . or not replaced in the new Bill . . . I recognise that the alternative is a hard decision, but I express the view that it would be the correct one both in terms of civil rights in the United Kingdom and this country's reputation in that respect among the International Community".

That is absolutely right. We accepted that view in 1987, and we accept it now. What lies behind it is the fact that exclusion orders apply only to people from Northern Ireland. As the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said, that is one reason why the Ulster Unionists have always opposed them, too.

We note with great approval that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, ahead of the Home Secretary's announcement today, has already announced the lifting of all orders in Northern Ireland. Lord Colville criticised what he described as the burden and the heavy work load that exclusion orders imposed on the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the armed forces in Northern Ireland.

If the peace process continues positively, it is improbable that either the Home Secretary or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will use the power in future. We therefore believe that, pending the outcome of the fundamental review that we seek, future use of exclusion orders—de novo use—should be suspended by means of section 27 provisions.

The Secretary of State said that that was all right, but that under section 27(7)(b) there would be a period of 24 hours before the use of exclusion orders could be invoked. In fact, the period is probably shorter than that, but the Secretary of State knows that, given the other powers of detention—we do not suggest that those should be put on ice at this stage—if the security situation changed radically, even if he had exercised his power to put the future use of exclusion orders on ice under section 27, in practice the power could be restored at a moment's notice, first by the use of the powers to detain a person against whom a potential exclusion order was to be made and then, when the order had been laid, as it could be, as a matter of urgency, by the use of the order itself.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has answered a question that I did not ask him. Will he now answer the question that I asked him in my speech? I said that, if the powers to make exclusion orders were removed, no action could be taken in respect of known terrorists who might want to cross into Great Britain in advance of a resumption of terrorism. If one waited until the point that the hon. Gentleman seems to think appropriate, it might be too late. That is why I said that we had to continue with the powers. Unless we did, we would not be able to keep in place any of the existing exclusion orders—those that I have retained after the review of that I undertook. They would all have to go. That is the question that I put to the hon. Gentleman earlier. May we have an answer to it?

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State is making enormously heavy weather of what is really a simple issue. Either he intends to continue to make future use of exclusion orders, which seems to collide with the peace process, at least while there is a great possibility of a permanent peace, or he does not. If the power to make exclusion orders were put on ice, what would really happen?

The Home Secretary has gone to great lengths to quote Mr. John Rowe's report, and Mr. Rowe drew attention to the fact that the power could be used at some stage in the 12 months following his report—that would now mean during the next nine months. If the security situation

deteriorated, as the right hon. Gentleman appears to suggest it may, there is no reason why the power could not be re-established quickly.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I do not think that the Home Secretary is aware of the history here. There was a time, especially in the early 1980s, when the argument against the extended use of the security services, including MI5, which was being considered as an alternative to exclusion orders, was always that the security services were stretched too far. That is one of the big changes since that time.

The security services are no longer overstretched, because of the collapse of the cold war and the changed security situation in Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary himself admitted that there were only 40 people whose movements interested him in connection with exclusion orders. The preference would be to use the security services as they ought to be used and as they are prepared to be used, rather than using internal exile.

Mr. Straw: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's point, which is connected with the detail of Lord Colville's argument in his 1987 report.

I shall now deal briefly with extensions of detention. One of the features of democratic societies is that decisions to detain people are made judicially, by a process separate from the role of Ministers and politicians. On Monday, the House re-emphasised its commitment to the need for such a separation of powers, when it agreed without a vote to remove Ministers' discretion on miscarriages of justice and to transfer it to an independent criminal cases review commission.

However, under the legislation before us decisions to extend detention are made by Ministers. In our judgment, that is inherently unsatisfactory, as was recognised by the present Foreign Secretary who said in 1989, when he was Home Secretary:

"We continue to look for a judicial mechanism".—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1989; Vol. 146, c. 65.]

Last year, the Home Secretary said that that search had been in vain.

I accept that this is not an easy area, and I have read in detail the views of John Rowe and of Viscount Colville in last year's debate on the PTA renewal in the other place. However, there are other examples within our common law system in which a judge effectively makes a judicial decision even though not all the evidence, or even any of it, can be shown to the defendant. Ex parte applications to protect the disclosure of certain unused prosecution evidence provide one example. Another arises when the question is whether public interest immunity should apply to evidence. I do not believe that such a mechanism would be impossible to draw on if the will were there.

The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) was right to say that one of the reasons why this country has got into difficulty with the international courts is not that we treat terrorist suspects worse than other countries do. Despite our reservations about some aspects of the legislation, there is ample evidence to suggest that we treat terrorist suspects better than other comparable countries do.

We get into difficulties because Ministers are involved in decisions on detention, whereas in other countries—those with civil law procedures—a magistrate or some other detached person in the judicial system makes those decisions. That is one of the practical reasons why we should continue to search for a judicial element in extensions of detention and elsewhere within the scheme of the Bill.

For the past 25 years, the people of the north of Ireland have had to live with the ever-present dangers of political violence. Two Members of the House—Airey Neave and Ian Gow—have been murdered by terrorists.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): What about Robert Bradford?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry.

All Northern Ireland politicians have lived through periods of mortal danger. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) still carries the scars to prove that. We can neither forgive nor forget the terrible and brutal atrocities which have scarred our society. But we also have an obligation to do all in our power to stop those atrocities from happening again.

In the changed circumstances of a sustained ceasefire, now is the time to review precisely what anti-terrorist legislation we need. That would not undermine the fight against terrorism but strengthen it by ensuring that the powers needed for that fight are proportionate to the threat and that they enjoy the consent and understanding of the public of the United Kingdom. Labour wants a bipartisan approach in this area. I greatly regret that the Government have not accepted our proposals to achieve the consensus that we seek. It is for that reason—and for that reason alone—that we will express our regret in the Lobby tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the debate continues, I must point out that many hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that hon. Members will exercise self-restraint regarding the length of their speeches, so that no one is disappointed in this very important debate.

5.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I listened carefully to the precisely constructed arguments of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), but nothing he said detracts from my conclusion that it would be irresponsible and indefensible to do anything other than support the renewal of the provisions.

I think that the hon. Gentleman makes two mistakes. First, he gives inadequate attention to the comprehensive and convincing arguments put forward by Mr. John Rowe for renewal. I do not believe that I have read an independent annual report which so convincingly put forward the argument for renewal since the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act came into being.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that he does not like the powers of detention and the exclusion orders. I respect that, but he makes an entirely false deduction from that premise, and says that, because of that dislike, he and his right hon. and hon. Friends must go into the Opposition Lobby tonight. That is not the case. There is an alternative.

The Opposition could say that the overriding interest of the country is to maintain the fight against terrorism. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues can put on record to this House, the media and the country their opposition to two significant aspects of the measures. They can

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

nevertheless say that, despite their opposition to those points, the importance of having the means to fight terrorism is so overriding that they will vote with the Government. I suspect that, if the Opposition did that, they might conceivably find that they were not 40 points ahead in the opinion polls, but 42 points. They may feel, however, that they do not need that additional luxury.

There are a number of reasons why we should renew the provisions. The first is entirely related to Northern Ireland, and Mr. Rowe rightly made much of that. He reported that there remains

"a very real threat of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland".

He pointed out that

"activity by terrorist groups has not stopped",

and referred to assaults, intimidation, robberies, extortion, racketeering, money-collecting, the possession of firearms and explosives and the Irish National Liberation Army's continued reluctance to renounce what it regards as an armed struggle. On Northern Ireland issues alone, there is sufficient justification for the renewal of the measures.

The second reason why the House would be mistaken to do anything other than support renewal relates to international terrorism. It is very often overlooked that, although the genesis of the measures lay with the Birmingham atrocity and a number of other acts thereafter, the United Kingdom remains a focal point for visitors from many nations who have brought to London in particular their own factional interests and who fight their own factional battles.

Last year, only one non-Irish foreign national was arrested under the PTA, but that was an exception. The average figure during the previous 10 years was 33, and the peak year was 1984, when 73 foreign nationals were arrested under the PTA. We must accept that international terrorism continues to be a real threat, and Mr. Rowe rightly drew attention to that. There is justification for the continuation of the Act on the grounds of international terrorism as well.

The third reason why it would irresponsible not to renew the measures is simply—as Mr. Rowe pointed out—that the powers are needed and working. On proscribing, Mr. Row wrote:

"In all circumstances it is clear that this part of the Act is needed".

On exclusion orders, he wrote:

"There is value in the exclusion order preventing terrorism . . . this part of the Act should be continued".

On terrorist funding, he wrote:

"These powers of PTA are necessary".

On arrest and extension he wrote:

"There is a continuing need for the power of arrest under section 14, and the power of extension of detention".

Mr. Rowe's conclusion—to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary drew attention in his remarks—is:

"PTA should be renewed, with every Part as at present enacted."

The last reason why we should renew the powers is not insignificant. The police who were on the front line of the fight against terrorism have been found to be using the powers fairly, and they wish them to continue. The House would need a very good reason to deny them those powers, and I for one cannot see what those reasons are.

On the grounds that I have outlined, there is a compelling argument for doing nothing other than renewing the provisions.

5.16 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am grateful to have caught your eye so early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I take note of what you said and I shall try to contain my remarks and be as brief as possible, as I know that other Members want to speak.

I have a vivid memory of being a young Member of Parliament 21 years ago in the Chamber and of being told of the awful atrocity that had occurred at Birmingham. The deaths of those innocent young people on the mainland of Britain was a tragedy, although I realise that similar events had occurred in Northern Ireland for a good deal longer. The response of the House 21 years ago to that event was fairly predictable. All of us were shocked, and the House represented the anger that was felt through the whole of the United Kingdom about that atrocity. Therefore, the Prevention of Terrorism Act was born.

I was present in the Chamber for not all, but part, of the 36 hours it took the House to pass that legislation, and it was placed on the statute book 21 years ago. We passed it because of the feelings which we had at the time about the appalling violence of the IRA. I well remember listening to what I would consider to be the finest speech I ever heard in this Chamber, from Brian Walden, the then Labour Member for Birmingham, Ladywood. It is a great pity that we did not have the cameras in the Chamber on that occasion, so people could go back to look at that speech. All we have instead is the cold print of *Hansard*.

That was the time when the Act was born. I voted for it, and I continued to vote for its renewal for a number of years thereafter. But, as time went by, I, and my party, began to realise that the draconian powers—those are not my words, but words used by people who have reviewed this legislation—contained in the Act were becoming unsustainable. The erosion of people's civil liberties and human rights, which are clearly contained in the Act, can no longer be sustained.

The Act has undoubtedly produced a very corrosive atmosphere in certain parts of the country and in certain communities. It has been counter-productive to its original intent because it has not prevented terrorism in any shape or form. Because of its draconian powers, it has damaged Britain's standing with the rest of the world. We introduced the measure 21 years ago and the Home Secretary is asking the House to renew it for a further year. Is it not a bitter irony that this Act has come of age during the time of peace in Northern Ireland?

The Government have always said that there is no such person as a political prisoner in the United Kingdom and I agree but, with hindsight, the provisions of the Act have run contrary to that belief. The Act has enhanced the status of prisoners because, as the Home Secretary said, the Government have had to apply for a derogation from the European court, which basically means that we are in a state of war. If that does not enhance their status, I do not know what does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said that there appears to be some difference between the way in which the Home Secretary has operated the

provisions of the PTA and the way in which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has operated the emergency provisions Act.

The justification for continuation of the PTA is the possibility that paramilitaries may go back to the gun if peace breaks down in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) gave the figures earlier. In 1994, only one person was detained under the category of international terrorism, but 1,509 other people were detained under the provisions—I think that that is the right figure—in Northern Ireland and the mainland of the United Kingdom, and nearly 80 per cent. were released without charge. It is difficult to interpret those figures to mean anything other than that the PTA is seen as an anti-Irish Act, and it is seen as such by the vast majority of law-abiding Irish citizens in the United Kingdom.

The Home Secretary has spelt out the justification for the Act and its renewal. The problem with the PTA, from the perspective of the principle of equality under the law, is that, whatever the Home Secretary or any of his successors or predecessors might say, the prisoners have been treated under a legal system that has not applied to ordinary criminals. They have been given a special category and denied the normal rights given to ordinary people in custody and on charge. The state has been seeking the benefit of the odious label, without accepting the need to extend to those suspects the procedural safeguards that are routinely available to non-paramilitary defendants.

The PTA has created special criminal offences for subversives and it gives the Executive wide powers of arrest, detention and exclusion of terrorist suspects, while claiming that they are just ordinary criminals. That is the paradox of the Government's thinking.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said, it is a pity that there can be no cross-party consensus on the matter. We believe that anti-terrorist legislation is required, and it is a pity that the Home Secretary did not take up the offer of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, because consensus is necessary.

In the past, because of the attitude that the Opposition take, it has been said that Labour is soft on terrorism. I resent that remark. Everyone who has had responsibility for Northern Ireland, as I did for six years on the Opposition Front Bench, has condemned the IRA and other paramilitaries for the atrocities that they have committed—as has every other hon. Member in this House, especially those representing Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and I—with some risk to my life—have never ceased in our condemnation of the IRA, so I will not take lessons from anyone who suggests that we are soft on terrorism simply because we disagree with the way in which the PTA has been used.

We are debating the renewal of the legislation at a time of peace in Northern Ireland. I was in Belfast and Derry during Christmas week and there was a palpable sense of relief among the ordinary people. Christmas week—a joyous week, when we all celebrate the birth of Jesus—and the people of Northern Ireland were enjoying the freedoms that everyone in this Chamber has come to accept as commonplace, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said. I hope and pray that the peace will continue and that the renewal of the Act will not destabilise the peace process, but I certainly do not think that it will necessarily help it.

Mention was made of exclusion orders and the Home Secretary will be aware that last year I raised the case of John Matthews, a young man from Derry who had been taken in under the PTA. He was in a high security gaol for three months and was brought before a stipendiary magistrate. The prosecuting authorities told the magistrate that they were withdrawing all the evidence against him and the magistrate said, "You may leave this court without a stain on your character," which he did. Five minutes later, he was re-arrested and the Secretary of State signed an exclusion order. Even to this day, Mr. Matthews does not know the reason.

If the boy were guilty of any offence, he should have been tried and brought to justice in the proper way. He should not have been excluded in that way. John Matthews is in Altnagelvin hospital having his wisdom teeth removed. I hope that some of that wisdom will flow around the Secretary of State for the Home Department in future when he considers exclusion orders.

Finally, I saw an interesting piece of news on the tapes yesterday, which read:

"The IRA ceasefire has allowed police in London to boost operations against other criminals, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner said today. Hundreds of officers who would otherwise be deployed countering the threat of random terrorism attacks were now working in other areas, said Sir Paul Condon . . . He was commenting at the launch of the Metropolitan Police Service's first police plan, which, in a reflection of the IRA ceasefire, does not list counter terrorism amongst its top priorities."

Those were the words of the chief of the biggest police force in London, and here we are, once again debating whether we should renew the order.

I cannot vote for this order this evening, for the reasons that I have explained. I hope that, next year, we shall not have to go through this process again. I hope that there will be stability and the peace process will solidify. I hope that the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland will get round the table and discuss the issues of the governance of Northern Ireland in a peaceful, progressive way.

5.29 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I commend to the House the excellent and probing report on the operation of the PTA drawn up by John Rowe.

How do the majority of law-abiding people in Northern Ireland view the so-called "ceasefire and peace process"? They see that it is to the advantage of the terrorists, especially the IRA, as the IRA can dictate when that peace will be broken. In the interim, the Government are dancing to a tune of concessions in order to keep the Provisional IRA sweet. Mr. Rowe refuses to be won over by IRA blarney or promises that the violence is over permanently. The truth is that the IRA has no intention whatever of decommissioning or surrendering arms. It remains today one of the advanced terrorist organisations in the western world, with the greatest possible killing potential.

I am amazed at Members of this House who visit Northern Ireland and say that all is well. All is not well. If they visited people in the constituencies of hon. Members represented here, they would see that they are targeted by the IRA and the police have warned them that they are in danger. They should go to the homes of people who have

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

been told that, for safety's sake, they must leave the home in which they have lived all their lives. Is that what the House believes peace is?

One has only to look at what has taken place during the period when hon. Members have eulogised the wonderful spirit of peace. Mr. Rowe said that the

"risk of terrorism continuing is a real one."

That is a factual statement, because terrorism is continuing. The report does not try to mask the reality that the IRA could, at any moment, resume its military terrorism. It has not stopped its vicious and atrocious assaults, nor stopped funding its organisation.

From the Provo ceasefire to the close of last year, there were 70 incidents. Perhaps the House agrees with Mr. Maudling's view that there is an acceptable level of violence. In January, nine vicious assaults took place. I do not know how one draws the distinction between knee-capping a person and giving that person a bit of towel to bite on as nails are driven through a stick into the calves of his legs. I do not know what hon. Members would prefer to have done to them. That is supposed to be peace.

The rate at which the IRA is stealing cars throughout Belfast, taking them to west Belfast, removing their engines' ancillaries and selling them is colossal. It is beyond even the police to reckon how many incidents of that type are happening all over the city. At midnight on 17 January, two soldiers sustained serious head injuries on the Antrim road. On 29 January, two petrol bombs were thrown in Strabane. A man was injured by a shooting incident in Monagh Pass. The Army defused an incendiary device in a shop on the Newtownards road. The Army disposed of a bomb at Woolworth and another bomb in Habitat in Belfast. The Army disposed of a further bomb in North street. A number of Orange halls have been attacked at Maree, Bawn and Pomeroy. In January, five armed robberies in Northern Ireland were all carried out by terrorists. Yet we are told that there is peace.

I remind the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), who talked about the wonderful spirit at Christmas, that we have had IRA ceasefires at Christmas for a very long time. They are nothing new. We need to come down to what is really happening in Northern Ireland and how people there feel. There can be a permanent peace only if the terrorists' arms—their capability to kill, maim, bomb and destroy—are taken from them.

Whereas at first Ministers used the word "surrender", they now use the word "decommission". Today, we heard on our radios and televisions the voice of Mr. McGuinness from Londonderry saying that there can be no question of the IRA giving up any of its arms until the British Army and the RUC give up their arms, and every licensed gun in Northern Ireland is handed in. He said that only then will it be time to talk about the IRA surrendering its arms. Is that the basis on which this so-called "peace" is to be made?

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Does my hon. Friend agree that many people in Northern Ireland have expressed great anger at the Secretary of State's statement in the United States of America that a "token" gesture will be required of the IRA before Her Majesty's Ministers will enter into talks with murderers like Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein?

Rev. Ian Paisley: From what we saw on our television screens of the Secretary of State, I was amazed that he went to America to make that announcement. Why did he not tell it to us in Northern Ireland, given that we are most concerned about it?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the word "token" never crossed my lips, either in the United States of America or anywhere else?

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is not a matter of semantics. What did cross the Secretary of State's lips was the fact that there could be a gesture with a small amount of arms handed over and that faith could be put in the word of the terrorists that they would cease their activities. The Secretary of State will no doubt hear for himself the reaction of people in Northern Ireland.

Rev. William McCrea: Does my hon. Friend know that the Government of the Irish Republic and Her Majesty's Government know that there are currently three dumps in the Irish Republic? They know exactly where the arms are. Those weapons have been lost to the terrorists and will be used as that gesture because the IRA can never use those weapons again.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have heard it said by those who are acquainted with how the IRA works that the authorities in the south of Ireland are well aware of weapons hidden there.

Mr. Dicks: I understand—perhaps the hon. Gentleman will correct me if I am wrong—that there will be no move to have Adams and McGuinness sitting round the negotiating table until every last weapon that they own has been handed in. Is that wrong?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman replies, may I point out that we are dealing not with the general state of the peace negotiations but with the renewal or otherwise of the provisions against terrorism? I hope that he will address that point.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, but all the other speakers today discussed relevant matters, and I thought that I would also have the leniency of the Chair. I am glad that I got as far as I did, and I thank you for your leniency.

Mr. Dicks: The Government would not talk to IRA/Sinn Fein until all their weapons had been surrendered.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I agree that that is what I, and everyone, understood, but now we can see them weakening and weakening until we do not know when Ministers will sit at the table. That is the feeling.

There is a noticeable variance between what the Home Secretary says and what the Northern Ireland Office says. The Home Secretary hides behind Mr. Rowe's report, rightly. I agree with the report; I commend it. However, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland issued a statement on 17 February 1995, and he said:

"As Mr. Rowe himself makes clear, most of his work was completed before the PIRA cessation of violence and it was wholly completed before the loyalist cessation. His recommendations do not, therefore, take full account of the new situation which these events created, nor of the Government's working assumption that the ceasefires are intended to be permanent."

However, when we read the report, we discover that the villain—Mr. Rowe himself—makes an entirely different affirmation. He says:

"It is said, at least as to Northern Ireland, that since the ceasefires terrorism has stopped, and talks have started and the Government has a working assumption that the ceasefire is intended to be permanent. The submission was made to me that the PTA should not now be used in any circumstance, and that no use should have been made of it from 31 August 1994 onwards. I have considered these points carefully, but my conclusion remains the same, and I am convinced of it."

I do not understand, therefore, why the Home Secretary comes to the House and praises Mr. Rowe and then that statement emanates from the Northern Ireland Office, saying that Mr. Rowe was not fully acquainted with the situation. He has studied the situation, and I believe that he has made a right assessment of what has taken place.

Mr. Rowe says about exclusion orders:

"I . . . have seen a clear indication that exclusion orders can deter excluded persons from engaging in terrorist acts in Great Britain . . . there is proof that exclusion orders have disrupted the terrorists' plans."

Anything that can disrupt the terrorists' plans, anything that can keep a mass bomb from reaching its destination, should be welcomed by every fair-thinking person in the House.

On Victory in Europe day, Winston Churchill made one of his very few impromptu speeches in the House. He said:

"the strength of the Parliamentary institution has been shown to enable it at the same moment to preserve all the title deeds of democracy while waging war in the most stern and protracted form."—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1945; Vol. 410, c. 1869.]

That is what we need to do. We need to wage war on those terrorists from whatever side they come, and we also have to keep to the rules of democracy. If a person sets out to take away the life of another person, I believe that the law needs to step in and stop that person committing that crime.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said in the House:

"I believe that we have a prime duty to defend the liberties of our constituents, but a Bill of Rights and a whole volume of liberties are of little value to someone who is 6 feet beneath the ground or someone whose body has been dismembered by a bomb."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1974; Vol. 882, c. 699.]

Of course at that time he was not so contaminated with IRA/Sinn Fein; he was speaking from his heart about what was happening in this part of the United Kingdom. I would say to the House today—

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have given way a great deal. I am beyond my time. I shall be castigated by Madam Deputy Speaker, so I shall not give way.

Mr. Mallon: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it right that an accusation of that type should be made against the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara)—that he has been contaminated by the IRA—and should not that remark be withdrawn, in the interests of the type of justice that you are talking about?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think it was just about within the bounds of the way that we deal with things here, but I would caution all Members, especially in these delicate circumstances, to remember that we maintain the very highest standard of conduct and manners, especially when referring to other Members of the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley: If people want to call for the IRA, with its arms still intact, to be brought to the discussion table and treated as a body with constitutional politicians, I for one will call that person a person contaminated by Sinn Fein/IRA, without apology. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has said very nice things about me, with which the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) would quite agree. I am stating the facts, and I have read from *Hansard*, and if the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North wants to go back on his own word, that is for him to do.

All I am saying to the House and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I conclude my speech, which has been greatly interrupted—I should really be pleading for accident time—is that the House has a solemn responsibility to safeguard the people of Northern Ireland in the same way that it safeguards the people of the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Home Secretary said that he was a Unionist. As a Unionist, he should be as dedicated to keeping the people of Northern Ireland in safety as he is to keeping in safety any person in the rest of the United Kingdom.

5.46 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I do not need to reiterate the list of misery, death and mayhem that originally precipitated the legislation and has kept it on the statute book for so long. That has been done by other hon. Members.

I do not want to dwell at length on the peace process and the current cessation of violence, except to say two things. First, violence has not ceased altogether in Northern Ireland, and several unpleasant incidents have taken place in that period, and therefore some of the Northern Ireland legislation may continue to be necessary for that reason.

Secondly, confidence needs to be maintained and built on, and that must include a decommissioning process whereby arms and explosives come out of the hands of terrorists so that it becomes clear to people that they are not about to resort to terrorism again, or to use the possibility of doing so as a negotiating ploy.

The problem with that is that we shall never know whether we have obtained all the Semtex and whether all the guns have been removed from either side. The world that one hon. Member described, in which not only every gun held by terrorist organisations, but every Army weapon, every RUC weapon and every licensed gun in Northern Ireland had disappeared, is not the real world.

Judgments will need to be made at some time whether the process that is taking place is one in which a return to violence becomes genuinely unlikely or even very difficult for terrorists to undertake. Whoever has ministerial responsibility at that time will have to make that judgment, and he will not be able to do so by simply saying, "It is fine now, everyone. I have got all the weapons; I know that we are all right." That will not happen. I do not envy anyone the job of making the judgment, but that process must begin.

The other side of the coin to building confidence through decommissioning is that the political process must keep going, and all those involved have to be clearly engaged in that process to provide the basis on which confidence can be built on that side.

It would be irresponsible to scrap the anti-terrorist legislation entirely with immediate effect. We shall therefore vote to renew it tonight, although we shall

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

continue to demand a general review of the working of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. That review should take account of the security position as it develops in the next few months so that parts of the Act that are not effective for security purposes can be scrapped. Anti-terrorist powers are major limitations on civil liberty, which can be justified only if they are essential for security. They should not be treated as bargaining counters in the peace process. Nor should they be determined by negotiations between the Conservative and Labour parties in the hope of enabling Labour to get off the hook in voting against renewal. I do not believe that Labour Front Benchers would recommend that their hon. Friends vote against renewal in the Lobby tonight if they thought that they could win that vote. The Labour party is making a point and, in part, I agree with it.

However, I am not prepared to make that point in that way because I believe that we must keep the powers on the statute book since they may be required for security purposes. We should continue to argue about the speed with which a review can be undertaken and changes made.

I turn to the key elements in the prevention of terrorism legislation. The very fact that the Home Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary have revoked a significant number of exclusion orders is a sign that those powers are no longer as valuable as they may have been in other circumstances. The powers should be relaxed on those grounds alone; they should not be relaxed as some kind of boost to the peace process or as an offering to the negotiations.

It must be demonstrated that the exclusion orders are not appropriate for use in current circumstances. Such major incursions into civil liberty and such defiance of the Unionist principle of one United Kingdom are very difficult for the Government to defend unless there is an overriding security reason for doing so. We have so few exclusion orders now that we must be close to seeing their complete removal. We would have to make sure that we could cope with the security consequences of that move and ensure that the people from whom the exclusion orders had been lifted did not pose a threat to this country. There are ways of achieving that goal.

I submit that the powers of detention without charge will need to be either cut back, as has occurred in respect of international terrorism, or put under judicial control. There have been several references to the debate about judicial consideration of detention. Curiously, most of the countries with which we are compared in discussions about human rights have judicial processes for extended detention—a fact of which Mr. Nick Leeson is already aware. Other people who find themselves in trouble and in courts overseas become aware of them pretty quickly also.

We have a rather different tradition and, in some ways, it is a stricter one. In this instance, it has led to the Executive taking responsibility for detaining people without charge for longer than would normally be permitted. Mr. Rowe believes that judges might be seen to be acting as part of the Executive if they were brought into that process. If we must maintain powers for longer detention for any period of time, we may have to try to overcome Mr. Rowe's objections and work out how the judiciary can participate in the process without merely being a servant of the Executive. On the present evidence, I do not think that we will be dealing with the number of cases that initially made that outcome seem very difficult, or impossible, to achieve.

I think that the powers relating to the proscription of organisations are of diminishing security value. Their main importance may now lie in the way in which proscription expresses the revulsion of people in this country at the activities in which terrorist organisations—both republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations—have engaged. People find it very hard to accept the fact that legally permitted organisations carry out acts of terrorist violence within our jurisdiction. However, I think that those powers are of limited usefulness as a security measure.

The powers for the confiscation of funds, the investigation of funds and the transfer of money and money laundering are potentially of continuing importance—especially if there is a possibility of a return to violence. They are also of great significance in relation to terrorism that is not related to Northern Ireland. As has been mentioned already, the House dealt with an order relating to terrorism from the Indian sub-continent only a few days ago. Those powers and the powers of investigation associated with them under section 17 and schedule 7 may be needed in the future.

I think that the border controls and stop-and-search activities at points of entry are likely to prove of continuing importance. If exclusion orders are dropped, it may still be necessary to keep a fairly careful watch on who is crossing from Northern Ireland to Britain or who is travelling in the opposite direction. Those powers may serve a continuing purpose.

Most members of the public, when subjected to the inconvenience created by the powers, recognise that they are important—perhaps more readily than they would in other contexts. When there is broader debate about passport and border controls, I often wonder whether hon. Members know how irritated some of my constituents get about delays with border controls and passports. However, in the context of Northern Ireland terrorism, I think that people are appreciative of the reasons for the powers and co-operate readily when showing their passports or in allowing their luggage or their vehicles to be searched.

The Government will have to review the separate Northern Ireland emergency provisions. If Ministers have to come back to the House for another renewal of the present prevention of terrorism legislation without undertaking a full review, it will be a sign either that the peace process has failed—leaving a heightened security threat—or that they are not keeping up to date with current security requirements.

I do not believe that the mix of security requirements which makes up the legislation in its present form is likely to be what we will need a year from now. Other forms of terrorism may be become more important than Northern Ireland terrorism, so a different mix of powers will be required and we will rely rather less on this emergency legislation than on the general body of law.

I believe that a review is essential, and the Secretary of State recognised that in his remarks today. He believes that a fundamental review of the powers is appropriate, but he does not want to embark upon it as quickly as I would wish. We shall pursue that area of difference with him and we will continue to emphasise our view that some of the features of the legislation must not be regarded

as permanent fixtures of our statute book because they represent major incursions into civil liberty. However, we believe that we must ensure that the powers are intact while the review process takes place.

5.55 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I wish that I did not have to support my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in the Lobby tonight, but I must support him for the following reason: the Irish Republican Army is still in being. It still

"maintains its arsenal; is still recruiting; still targeting; still training; still researching improvised weapons".

They are not my words; they are the words of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. There is an additional reason which he did not list when making his speech in the United States: the IRA is still fund-raising.

"Extortion and blackmail, and intimidation and the collecting of funds, all for terrorist purposes, still goes on".

They are not my words, but the words of Mr. Rowe in his report.

In researching for my speech in this debate, I used two very helpful briefing documents: first, a case for the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 from the Committee on the Administration of Justice in Northern Ireland; and, secondly, Mr. Rowe's report. I studied both documents very carefully. The CAJ report makes some very interesting points. I share its wish that the Act could be scrapped. I accept that its provisions result in a departure from the ideal standards of civil rights and natural justice. But bombers and murderers deny their victims the most fundamental of human rights: the right to life.

As much as I respect the case advanced by the CAJ, I reject it because it is founded on a false premise. It claims that Northern Ireland's emergency is over; but it is not. As the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) explained, the emergency is certainly not over. All that has changed since we debated the Act last year is that there is a temporary ceasefire which has been called by some—but not all—of the organisations concerned. Would-be negotiators are still supported by evil psychopaths with guns in their pockets and Semtex in their briefcases.

The other document that I considered was Mr. Rowe's report. His research is meticulous and his objectivity is impressive. The report has persuaded me that all of the provisions in the Act must continue for at least one more year. His general conclusions are deeply disturbing. In paragraph 9 of the report, he states:

"Since the ceasefires there have been assaults and intimidation, which are terrorist related; likewise robberies of shops and of the person; and they continue to take place. There is extortion still going on, and racketeering, by terrorists: and there are still collections of money being made for terrorist funds".

That leads him to a very clear and simple conclusion:

"In short there is activity and threat."

I find that disturbing, but I find his detailed conclusions on each of the provisions equally disturbing.

He turns first to proscribed organisations and states in paragraph 18:

"The organisations which are proscribed are still in existence. It is known that they maintain their structures in place, and INLA has not announced a ceasefire. The IRA has done so; but after a robbery in Northern Ireland in the Autumn, and after the ceasefire, when a considerable sum of money was stolen, the IRA acknowledged that it was responsible: a public appeal was made for the return of the money taken, but nothing came of that".

He turns to exclusion orders and states in paragraph 22:

"there is proof that exclusion orders have disrupted the terrorists' plans."

That leads him to support the continuation of the power to make exclusion orders.

Regarding his comments on the funding of terrorism, there is no need to labour the point again, as it has been covered in the debate.

When he turns to arrest and detention, he states in paragraph 42:

"At the present time there is still terrorist related activity, and a threat . . . and therefore there is a continuing need for the power of arrest . . . and the power of extension of detention."

Finally, turning to his comments on port controls, he states in paragraph 68:

"It seems to me that . . . these powers of examination are vital, and my conclusion is that they should be continued."

In other words, an expert who was asked to examine the working of the Act during 1994, having done his research, concludes that every part of the Act is still necessary.

There is another reason why I support its continuation. It is a reason that I deeply regret having to raise in the debate, but I am afraid that I take yesterday's statement by my right hon. Friend and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as a weakening of his stance on the surrender of weapons and explosives. If I understand him correctly, it seems to me that terrorists will be allowed to keep their arsenals for some time to come. All they have to do is make a small gesture of good faith. Can we expect good faith from bombers or good faith from assassins? When in the history of the IRA has it ever shown good faith to anybody?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Of course I never said, and of course it is not the case, that terrorists are allowed to keep their weapons for some time to come. I have said, and the Prime Minister has said, that there is no case for anybody retaining arms which are illegally held. That is abundantly clear and there is no change whatsoever in the Government's position. I said that, before we could sit down with Sinn Fein in the substantive, inclusive political talks, there had to be substantial progress made on the decommissioning of arms. That was said not only by the Prime Minister but by Mr. Bruton. I also said:

"In a democracy, parties will not sit down, must not sit down, with another party that implies that if it doesn't get its way, it is prepared to condone a return to violence."

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for saying that and I am sorry to continue to labour the point, but a press statement from the Northern Ireland Office, which I assume he authorised, stated:

"In order to test the practical arrangements and to demonstrate good faith, the actual decommissioning of some arms as a tangible confidence building measure and to signal the start of a process."

If I understand that correctly—I am willing to give way to be told that I do not—I take it to be a weakening and I believe that to be wrong. I am sorry, but I cannot support my right hon. and learned Friend in that.

It gives me no pleasure to speak in these terms and I sincerely hope that nobody in the House will have to talk in the same way in a year's time. We have come a very long way since last August and I pay unreserved tribute

[Mr. Wilshire]

to all those who have been involved in the process, but the ceasefire has not yet become permanent. Terrorists have not yet called an end to their evil activities. The Act therefore remains necessary.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary asks for my support. I assure him that he has it for as long as he needs it.

6.4 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): We in Northern Ireland have enjoyed six months without serious terrorist incident. That is something for which the entire community is profoundly grateful. There has been a continuation of some terrorist activity, but none the less, the existence of the ceasefire is very welcome. Despite that, our judgment, together with that of other parties that have spoken this evening, is that tonight the House must renew the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

We are not out of the woods yet. We still have terrorist organisations which are armed to the teeth and regularly threaten a return to violence if they do not get their way. Scarcely a week goes by without Mitchell McLaughlin issuing a fresh threat of a return to violence.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) quoted from the speech by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in Washington recently. The part that struck me as significant was the reference to the IRA "still researching improvised weapons". The fact that they are still researching and trying to develop new weapons is clear evidence of the danger that exists.

It is not just our judgment in the House. The Irish Government have formed the same judgment, but although they have repealed the so-called state of emergency dating back to 1939, they have retained the "offences against the state" legislation that provides for special criminal courts and internment. They have retained their legislation, and we must do the same.

I shall not rehearse our arguments on previous occasions, but I shall briefly touch on parts of them. I shall not repeat our position on exclusion orders. We find them objectionable in principle. They are not new. They were not invented in 1974; they were also contained in the 1939 Act, on which the 1974 Act was based. Then and now, they were the recourse of lazy authorities that lit on that provision because it seemed an easy way of introducing control.

As to seven-day detentions, I still remain of the view that it is possible to introduce a sufficient judicial element. There is a problem here that can be solved. I am aware of Mr. J. J. Rowe's comments about judges, but that is not the issue. We are addressing how to introduce a judicial element, not the present High Court judges. That is not the appropriate point. Mr. Rowe's approach is that of one who sees only difficulties rather than trying to find a solution, and I am sure a solution can be found.

While the Act has to be renewed for a further year, it must be the hope of hon. Members that this will be the last renewal, and that, despite the worries and concerns of so many hon. Members about whether the present temporary ceasefire will become permanent, it is important that we do not lose the protection that the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act provide with regard to terrorist acts. It is not wise to leave the United Kingdom without some permanent protection.

There will always be the danger of a renewal of republican violence, and there are also threats from what we have this evening called international terrorism. I shall mention just a few examples.

Groups involved in the civil war in Algeria are said to be using London. There was a murder last week in London which has been linked to an extreme Islamic group, which I understand is banned in some other countries. We may want to consider banning it here. The Pakistani Christians whose death sentences were quashed in Pakistan and who had to leave Pakistan because they would no longer be safe there, could not come to the United Kingdom because they would not be safe here. They had to go to Germany. That is a reflection on our country.

Therefore, while the Act has to be renewed for this year, in the coming year we should undertake a major review of the legislation for the purpose of considering what permanent provision should be made. It remains to be seen whether it will be possible to move to that permanent position in the course of the year, but it is now appropriate for the Government to move in that direction.

I imagine that, if consideration was being given to what permanent provision is needed to deal with terrorism, we would want to retain the port and entry control powers. The powers relating to arrest, search and special offences in the current legislation might be put in cold storage, but available if needed—with, of course, appropriate parliamentary safeguards. Such a review could not be confined to the PTA; it would have to involve the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991.

Sir Patrick Mayhew *indicated assent.*

Mr. Trimble: I am glad to see that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is nodding.

I believe that the form of the review should follow the precedent set by the 1979 Gardiner committee. I do not think it appropriate to involve a High Court judge. We have already expressed that view to the Home Secretary, and I gather from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that the Labour party tried to persuade him to follow the same line.

I understand the Home Secretary's caution, and I understand that there are still matters for him to consider; but I hope that he will not delay his action for too long, for action must be taken. He has acknowledged the need for permanent provision, and he has also acknowledged that a review is the best way in which to consider what that provision should be.

As for the stance of the official Opposition, I find it amazing—although we agree with the Labour party on some specific points. The hon. Member for Blackburn said, after referring to the need for a review, that, had such a review been announced, there would have been no vote against the order.

The Home Secretary and others acknowledge that such a review is necessary and will be carried out. The hon. Gentleman went on to say that the only problem was the issue of timing. Is that so important that he must divide the House, and send the wrong signal to terrorists?

I pay tribute to the way in which, over the past couple of years, the Leader of the Opposition has tried to change Labour's position. He has succeeded to some extent, but I am sorry that neither he nor his spokesman have had the courage to travel the rest of the way. We know the reason: the Opposition Back Benches contain a number of—well, "scoundrels" might be the appropriate word, but I am not sure whether it is in order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, it is not.

Mr. Trimble: I happily bow to your judgment, Madam Deputy Speaker, and withdraw the term. A number of Labour Back Benchers, however, would defy their leader because of motives of which I do not approve. I shall go no further.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): We are against the Act.

Mr. Trimble: Yes.

As other hon. Members have pointed out, the peace process depends on the surrender or decommissioning of weapons. Through my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), we have made what we consider to be a positive proposal, but time precludes me from giving the details.

I join the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) in deploring the confusion that seems to have crept into the Government's position. In his statement, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland seemed to be saying that, if some arms were surrendered, Sinn Fein and the rest of the IRA could take their place at the table and talk. Apparently, however—according to what I have been told—the Minister of State said on this morning's edition of "Today" that two stages were involved: "Surrender some weapons and you get into direct talks with Ministers; to get into the all-party talks, you must surrender a substantial number of weapons."

I must caution those outside the House that involvement in all-party talks will require more than a decision by Her Majesty's Government. It will require a decision by other parties—and we ourselves will have to be satisfied that those taking part in all-party talks are committed to exclusively peaceful methods. The onus will be on those other parties to satisfy us of that.

Following the differing statements of two Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office, I have been informed that, in a briefing today, the Government have told the press that they are about to move into bilaterial ministerial talks with the IRA. I hope to hear more about that when the Minister winds up.

I would have liked to explore the matter further, but time prevents me from doing so. I understand that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) is anxious to speak.

6.13 pm

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Let me reassure my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that I shall support him in the lobby. I feel, however, that, after the confusion caused by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the whole issue could be cleared up for good if he could reassure us—reassure me, in particular—that he will not sit down with any member of Sinn Fein or the rest of the IRA until the IRA has surrendered its weapons.

If he cannot give me such a categorical assurance now, I will assume that there has been some slippage in the Government's stance, or that I have completely misunderstood that stance. I am happy to give way to the Secretary of State if he wishes to clarify the position.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I readily take the opportunity offered by my hon. Friend. There has been no slippage. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have said time and again—and it does not rest only with us; the Government as a whole take the same stance—that, before inclusive political talks about future structures in Northern Ireland can take place, substantial progress must be made on the decommissioning of arms.

My hon. Friend may not like that; he may wish that I had put it in another, less realistic way. But that is the way in which the Government, the Prime Minister and—for what it is worth, and it is worth quite a lot—Mr. Bruton have put it. That is what must be achieved in the current exploratory phase of the discussions.

There has been no slippage whatever. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that, and will not go by highly inaccurate accounts in one or two newspapers today.

Mr. Dicks: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. If he were not a lawyer, I would suspect him of being a civil servant. Is he now saying that it is even more essential for the powers that we are discussing to be renewed?

As for exclusion orders, surely the idea is to stop IRA terrorists from coming to this country in the guise of those wanting to take part in discussions, and sending their troops here to be ready if and when things go wrong—ready to take on the British people in all sorts of ways. I suspect that, without exclusion orders—indeed, even with them—we cannot be sure that they have not already taken up their places.

The Opposition have talked of a fundamental review. If introduced now, such a review would only encourage the terrorists in the IRA to believe that what they have achieved so far can be achieved to an even greater extent. They could say, "Look—we have even persuaded the Government to undertake a fundamental review, before putting aside a single gun or anti-tank mortar." I consider it essential to hold back on any such review until we see the colour of their money—until we see how many weapons have been handed over.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) raised the question of wrongful detention. If we are to talk of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, I should point out that, to my knowledge, no one has been found guilty of either of those crimes, in which people lost their lives. Oddly enough, neither police force is now seeking any of the terrorists who committed those atrocities.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dicks: No; the hon. Gentleman is too close to the IRA.

I find it rather suspicious that both police forces have given up looking for the people who committed those dreadful atrocities. The comparison with a person who has been kept in prison for a few weeks is very poor.

Earlier, I raised with my right hon. and learned Friend the question of Gerry Adams and allegations about recourse to the European Court of Justice or the European

[Mr. Dicks]

Court of Human Rights. I am amazed that Mr. Adams—helped by Liberty, which always seems to want to help murderers and terrorists rather than victims—should have the audacity to take the case to one of those courts to try to obtain compensation for the fact that our exclusion orders prevented Mr. Adams from coming to this country.

As I told my right hon. and learned Friend earlier, rights and obligations are two sides of the same coin. How can Mr. Adams or Mr. McGuinness expect people in this country to recognise their rights when they do not recognise their obligations to the rest of us and act in a decent, humane and democratic fashion?

There would be a public outcry in this country if any indication were given that we would follow the line indicated by the European Court. I am amazed that we should even consider such a possibility, and I was grateful for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's assurance that the Government would pay no compensation and would not recognise the decision of the European Court, if such a decision were made.

I voted against the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, because I did not want a foreign country to have a say in the affairs of my country. Northern Ireland is still my country; I am a Conservative and unionist Member of Parliament. It seems odd that people cannot stand up and say clearly, "We will stand by our own people in Northern Ireland. We will ensure that they are listened to and that their views will be accepted by the House." I am concerned that any softening of the power will be a weakening of the Government's stance, perhaps giving the wrong message. All of us—some hon. Members anyway—live under the threat of those people. I am being told not to relax and that I should ensure that my security is as high as it was before the talks began. If that is the case, how can people, especially Opposition Members, say, "Christmas was wonderful. Everything is nice. It is all easing off." By God it is not easing off and I have an awful suspicion that, if the IRA does not get its way, it will return to weapons and bombs and we shall be sorry for any leniency and soft approach.

I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend and, as I said at the beginning, he will have my support in the Lobby this evening.

6.20 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I appreciate the assurance of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) that the voice of the people from the north of Ireland will be heard. I appreciate the opportunity once again to squeeze in whatever few points I can, as we are approaching the end of the debate, on a matter that is affecting my constituents probably more than any other hon. Member's in Northern Ireland or in Britain.

I strongly disagree, however, with the view that the emergency legislation should be renewed. I believe that enormous change is taking place in the north of Ireland, that the community there is crying out for a new beginning, that the Government have not responded with the vision, the courage or the imagination to create a new dispensation of justice.

I believe that that refusal shows the Government's lack of appreciation of the fact that six months of peace and what has gone on within the community have created a radically new context within which the prevention of terrorism Act will work in future. I believe that their refusal to change has made it more difficult to start the essential work of obtaining confidence in and constructive support for a system of justice. It is a uniquely significant opportunity for us to reverse the trend that exists in the north of Ireland, to build a new system of justice that can command support and confidence and can strengthen human rights protection in Northern Ireland and for Irish people in Britain.

I believe that it is essential that a move is made now to create a new system of justice, one that is in tune with the mood of hope and peace. I believe that the political process and justice—we should not forget this point—are not separate entities within Northern Ireland. They are interlocked. They are interdependent, and one cannot be progressed in isolation from the other, as we will learn as we go further down the road. This is an opportunity lost, in my view, because the refusal even to soften the contours of the Act makes our difficult task in Northern Ireland all the more difficult.

Many tributes have been paid to Mr. John Rowe, in relation to his report. I shall try to be honest. I believe that the report is flimsy. It is riddled with contradictions and, indeed, inaccuracies. It is a report on which no Government could base their future thinking. It is something that bears examination.

I make this point strongly. In the context of whatever further examination is to come, I make the plea now, on behalf of good sense, that Mr. John Rowe QC does not carry out that review. His job was to carry out a review of the legislation, yet in effect he has asked the Government, under section 27(6)(b), to review their own legislation. He has refused to do so. The contradictions run right through his entire report.

Let us start at the very beginning. Mr. Rowe tells us:

"a careful assessment must be made of the present situation in N.I. in order to judge the continuing need for the PTA".

He then proceeds to ignore that dictum, going so far as to observe, in the very same paragraph:

"I must reach a view without thinking what its effect might be".

What a luxury; what myopia for someone to have who is reviewing a piece of legislation as stringent and draconian as this. He says:

"I cannot have regard to such things."

Peace is what he is talking about. He also says:

"I must reach a view without thinking what its effect might be"?

He is talking about peace and the changing situation. Then, of course, on page 10, he tells us:

"However, I am allowed, I am sure, to have regard to current events."

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Mallon: I am not giving way. I have been present since the debate began. I shall give way, as I would not like to be accused of pique.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reconsidering. Both he and the hon. Member for Blackburn have misrepresented Mr. Rowe's attitude to the question. On page 2 of the report, when Mr. Rowe says that he cannot have regard to such things, what he is saying, quite clearly, is that he cannot have regard to signals. Those are political matters, and he is not a politician.

He does go on the say, as the hon. Gentleman says, that he can have regard to the current state of the situation in Northern Ireland in the context of making an assessment as to the risk and threat from terrorism. There is a clear distinction between those two, and Mr. Rowe has correctly and clearly identified that distinction.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the Secretary of State. I am glad that I gave way to him. The reality of the situation is that, in the very first page of the report, Mr. Rowe contradicts himself twice, and does so twice in the next paragraph as well.

Let us not end there. Let us look at his observations in relation to exclusion orders. Exclusion orders, let us remind ourselves, have been revoked by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary says that he will revoke most of his. Even Lord Colville accepted the evidence against exclusion orders, because they are a political decision, made by politicians, without any element of judicial review. They are made without the person concerned knowing the reasons why the decision was made.

Mr. Rowe tells us, in paragraph 27:

"anyone with experience of such applications—

for a judicial review—

"knows what a strain they are"—

oh, dearie me—

"in the sense that the natural rules are not fully in place."

The natural rules of what? The natural rules of justice. The man is talking about a judicial input into the decision-making process in relation to exclusion orders.

He goes further. Because the person's position would not be put, the judge therefore

"would not be hearing both sides: the rules of natural justice would simply be absent."

Those are the word of the man, the QC, who has given his judgment on exclusion orders. If that is his view of judicial input, how can he advocate that exclusion orders, which are based on the decisions of politicians who are advised by civil servants, without any argument against or legal representation, be kept intact, as he has recommended?

In relation to arrest and seven-day detention—section 14—I remind the House that, in 1994, 353 extension orders applied in the north of Ireland. Mr. Rowe tells us that applications for an extension state the ground of arrest. On a substantial number of occasions, especially in Northern Ireland, the reason is described not as evidence or even circumstantial evidence but as "reliable intelligence".

He states:

"The precise details and source of the intelligence are not stated, and I have not seen them."

In paragraph 34 he states:

"I have read the file relating to each one."

He drew the conclusion:

"The second part of the review is, in broad terms, to see if the powers have been fairly and properly exercised. My view is that . . . they have".

His view is that they have been fairly exercised, but he has not seen the intelligence and does not know the basis on which decisions were made. However, he declares that the powers have been "fairly and properly exercised". Any lawyer would question the validity of that judgment in relation to both those matters.

There is suspicion or belief that section 14 of the PTA and sections 17 and 18 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act are being used to trawl for information. Innocent people are arrested and detained for up to seven days in search of information. We should not be surprised by that, because a former Home Secretary, Sir Leon Brittan, told us that that was exactly the case, and he gave the reasons.

He said:

"The use of the powers of detention under the legislation has acted, first, as a deterrent to persons other than the people who have been detained. "

The law in this country is being used as a deterrent against people other than those who have been detained. That is sustained and supported by John Rowe QC.

Sir Leon went even further, when he was questioned by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). The right hon. Gentleman said:

"Will the Home Secretary make this point absolutely clear as it is crucial to many of us? Is he saying that it is right in a free society to detain innocent people without charge for the purpose of obtaining information from them?"

The Home Secretary's reply was remarkable. He said:

"It has been made clear not by me but by the courts that that is a legitimate and necessary use of the power."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1983; Vol.47, c.55-6.]

That finds favour with John Rowe QC, who has written this review which had garnered so much support and confidence. People in Britain should be asking the question that I am asking, because there are victims of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in this country's legal and judicial system, and its process of justice is one of those victims. People should look carefully at that.

Schedule 5(16) relates to ports and border controls. There is not a word as to how the legislation there may be softened. A person can be held for up to 12 hours without even a reasonable suspicion. People may ask, "Held by whom?" It does not have to be by a police officer. Anyone can lose his liberty for up to 12 hours at the whim, not even on a reasonable suspicion, of someone who is not a police officer.

Mr. Rowe thinks highly of that, because he says:

"The checks on these persons not hitherto known were selective or random steps."

That is again a random trawl for information. Because of the issues that face us, we must look at those salient points, and sincerely and legally question the validity and veracity of the report by John Rowe QC.

The loss of mutual respect between state and citizens cannot be restored by attempts to cling to unjustifiable powers which degrade the individual by making him vulnerable to the arbitrary and capricious exercise of those powers. Those are not my words—they are much too flowery. They are from a legal authority in the North of Ireland.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act is part of the past, and must be consigned to the lumber room of history to gather dust, rather than remain an active factor in shaping the future. The justification for its continued existence, a present and real immediate threat to the life of the nation—an emergency, as it is termed in the European convention on human rights, threatening the life of the nation—having passed, the Act ought not to be reviewed.

[Mr. Mallon]

A new, imaginative approach should be brought to the whole problem. We are sticking in the past, at a time when we should be leading the community in the north of Ireland and in Britain into a future with a new system of justice that will never make the mistakes of the past.

6.35 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): For the first time, the debate on this legislation is taking place in the context of peace in Northern Ireland. It is sad that some Unionist Members and some Back-Bench Tory Members do not seem to recognise the impact that our debates on this issue can have. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister for the way that they responded to peace process developments in Northern Ireland. All hon. Members, including Unionist Members, owe a debt to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. Perhaps we should bear that in mind in the debate.

Every time we look at the Act, we need to remind ourselves that it is a double-edged weapon. The vast majority of people who are picked up under the Act are never charged, let alone convicted—in many years, it is 90 per cent.—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has said, the reason is that the Act is designed to collect information.

That is why it has played into the hands of the terrorists, and why I said to the Home Secretary, through an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), that there has always been an alternative. It was to use the security forces, and that argument is infinitely stronger now that the security forces are not as stretched as they used to be. That applies to MI5 because of the collapse in the cold war, and in Britain because of the lack of the threat of Northern Ireland terror.

The Home Secretary missed an opportunity to respond in the way that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister responded, by making it clear not just that he wished to get rid of the legislation—I can understand that—but that it was his intention. If only he could say, as he avoided saying on the radio this morning, "I want to get rid of this Act, and I will get rid of it if the peace process continues."

The fact that he did not do that has led many people to worry—I put it no higher than that—that he wants to keep it on the statute book as a general Act to use against terrorism from whatever source. I hope that he is not saying that, and that at some stage he will take the opportunity, although not in the middle of my speech as I have only about two minutes left, to make it clear that he intends, whether in one year or five, to get rid of the Act if the peace process continues. That is what we need to hear.

The objections to the legislation by some Opposition Members are sometimes treated as related to a civil liberties issue. Some hon. Members make that mistake. It is not a civil liberties issue. The legislation has always been a fundamental threat to our constitutional assumption of separation of power between the judiciary and the Government.

Currently, a politician can decide whether a person should live in one part of the United Kingdom or in another. Under quite a bit of pressure, not least from me when I gave evidence in writing, that led Lord Colville to say that this was internal exile. It is the first time that it has existed in this country since Henry VIII. A politician should not have that power, not just because of civil rights but because of our constitution.

Similarly, a politician—the Home Secretary—should not have the power to decide that the police can detain a person and question him. A politician decides both those issues, and that is a fundamental assault not just on civil liberties but on our constitution. The danger is that that will become permanent. Again, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh referred to that.

The Prevention of Violence (Temporary Provisions) Act 1939 was introduced to deal with a number of acts of terror that died out in 1940. The Act was kept on the statute book until 1954. We are in danger of keeping the Prevention of Terrorism Act on the statute book for a similar length of time. We need to sow confidence in the peace process. The Government have made enormous moves on this matter, and I pay my compliments to them. Why not have trust and confidence in the people of Britain and of Northern Ireland, and say that we can stop using these powers?

The Government have an opportunity today to secure automatic agreement if they stop using exclusion orders and detention powers that are used by a politician to take people in for questioning, and if they give a commitment to review or to end the use of the Act as long as the peace process continues. This is not just about party political agreement, but about many hon. Members' conviction that we in Britain have never had this opportunity before.

Despite all the bombings and killings that took place, in the previous century as a result of Northern Ireland affairs—we forget that there were many of those—the Victorians never introduced internal exile or gave power to a politician to hold people in police stations. They were right not to give that power. Every hon. Member who agrees that this policy is counter-productive, undermines the peace process and, above all, threatens all the things for which the House and this country have stood for hundreds of years will join me and my colleagues in the No Lobby tonight.

6.41 pm

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement of the lifting of 16 of the 56 remaining exclusion orders. We note his willingness to continue to review the remaining exclusion orders on an individual basis.

As he is aware, the exclusion orders deny the right of a United Kingdom citizen to live where they choose. That aspect of the matter was included in the joint framework document, where both the British and Irish Governments pledged to encourage the adoption of a charter or covenant of fundamental rights within their respective jurisdictions, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland.

A number of fundamental rights were included: the right to freedom of expression of religion, the right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means, and the right to live wherever one chooses. We wanted the Home Secretary to acknowledge today the aim of his Government in that joint framework document, and to consider the necessity of the future use of exclusion orders. He and other hon. Members, including the hon.

Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), have argued that the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1994 should be renewed in its entirety on the advice of the latest operational audit produced last month by J. J. Rowe QC.

He did so advise, but he also stated that the Act

"should be kept under review in the next twelve months."

It is more that a question of timing. The valuable and detailed speeches from the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) pointed out some of the problems in the report. They showed that, if the Home Secretary could have been clearer tonight about his intention, his desire for and his timing on a general review, some of the difficulties that we have had in the House would have been avoided.

The position is uncertain. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, it has always been difficult to strike a balance between understandable and necessary caution and a response to an evolving and changing peace. The Home Secretary said that he did not want to lower his guard. He should not, but he could raise his sights. Occasionally, caution is needed; occasionally, courage is needed too.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) drew an interesting analogy with what Sir Paul Condon, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, said yesterday. He stated that terrorism was no longer among the six priorities in his policing plan for the new financial year. The police have ended armed road blocks, and the redeployment of officers from central London has started. Of course, Sir Paul stated that he had kept his anti-terrorist operations intact, saying:

"You don't dismantle anything you might need at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning".

Like Sir Paul, we are asking the Home Secretary to propose a change of priorities. We should have a general, full and independent review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, consider how one can suspend the power to make exclusion orders under section 27, and introduce a judicial element, as the hon. Member for Upper Bann said, to approve extended prevention orders. In that way, the Home Secretary could acknowledge the changes that are taking place, but keep the process in perspective.

It is not the case, as the hon. Members for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) implied, that Labour Members are opposed to anti-terrorist legislation. In the debate, we have readily acknowledged the need for it. We support proscription, to which the hon. Member for Spelthorne referred. We support the need for anti-terrorist legislation in relation to terrorist funding.

Only last week upstairs, without a Division, we let through an order that was part of the PTA to facilitate seizure of assets. That went through without opposition, and it was approved by us. The changing nature of terrorism legislation is the reason why we want to have a review now. The changes in international terrorism could have been taken into account in the months ahead.

The PTA has been a contentious piece of legislation because it gives powers to politicians, police and courts that go beyond those granted by ordinary law. In the past 20 years, unity has existed among hon. Members on both sides of the House, not only in our utter contempt for people dedicated to the indiscriminate and deliberate killing of innocent people, but in our sympathy for the trauma and pain of individuals and families who have suffered as the maiming and death have continued. They include Robert Bradford, who was not mentioned earlier. Like his friends and family, he will not be forgotten.

At the same time, it is important to give our support and thoughts to the families of people serving in the Army and police, who still suffer the loss of those near to them. We should like readily to acknowledge the efforts of the men and women in the police and the Army over these extremely tense and difficult years to minimise and contain the violence.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, the PTA was introduced by a Labour Government and supported by the Labour party for a number of years. Labour Members' concerns grew because what was initially a temporary measure began to look more and more permanent.

It also became clear year on year that, in a civilised society, it is wrong in principle to detain a suspect for nine days without judicial involvement, and to oblige a man or woman through the use of exclusion orders to live in parts of the country stipulated by politicians. In a civilised society, Governments cannot ignore the rule of law; otherwise, by their very actions, they destroy what they are trying to protect and defend.

Today, hon. Members have acknowledged that last year my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition tried to achieve cross-party co-operation for an independent review. We were unsuccessful.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am not surprised.

Ms Mowlam: I am sorry that the hon. Lady does not find it surprising. Last year and this year, we have done our best to reach an agreement across the House. We supported the Government on the Downing street declaration, and on the framework document. We tried again to achieve bipartisan consensus on this issue. The hon. Lady should acknowledge that this year the position has moved on considerably. We have had more than six months of peace in Northern Ireland. Informal talks are beginning on how that process can move forward.

As we have often done in the House, we acknowledge and applaud what has been done by the Prime Minister, Northern Ireland Members, politicians in Dublin and, above all, the people of Northern Ireland, who deserve the peace process to continue, and who have worked desperately in the past six months to keep it going. We support the efforts of all the politicians and people in the peace process. We will continue to work constructively to try to achieve peace.

I say to hon. Members on the other side of the Chamber that we want a general review by a person of independent and high status, the introduction of judicial approval for detention order extensions, and suspension of the powers to make exclusion orders. Suspension is not possible under section 27. The Government should agree not to use those powers while the peace process continues.

After the vote tonight and in the months ahead, we will continue that policy, because we believe that it is important. Such legitimate demands have wide support in the House this evening. We do not want to divide the House on the order, but we shall do so. I hope that, in the months ahead, we will not have to do so again as the peace process develops.

6.49 pm

Mr. Howard: This debate takes place against a different background from that of recent years, and all hon. Members who have contributed to it have remarked on that fact.

My hon. Friends the Members for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) were robust in their support for the need for these provisions. My hon. Friends the Members for Basingstoke and for Spelthorne based their speeches on careful analyses and assessments of the Rowe report. In relation to the matters causing them concern, I commend to my hon. Friends the Members for Spelthorne and for Hayes and Harlington the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I suggest that they study his words carefully; if they do so, I am sure that they will find that their anxieties are allayed.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) launched into a diatribe against the order and its provisions, and ended up calling for consensus. I must tell him and the Labour party that, so long as there remains a risk and a threat, there cannot be a consensus based on a suggestion that we should lower our guard, dismantle our defences against terrorism or remove powers that are necessary. That is the truth of the matter, but, of course, Opposition Members do not like to be reminded of it.

The truth is that Opposition Members will vote for the dismantling of all these provisions, and they will vote for the removal even of those powers that they regard as necessary.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): We have no option.

Mr. Howard: They will vote in that way not because, as the hon. Gentleman just said, they have no option, but because, as the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) pointed out, their leaders do not have the courage to face out their Back Benchers who will never support this legislation. If people ever want to know how a Labour Government would behave, they should study carefully the Labour party's attitude to this legislation, and they will find no better or more accurate guide.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) made a characteristic speech, although it was not always clear to me whether he was supporting the order. I suggest that the order itself is the strongest indication of the Government's determination to protect the security of the people of the United Kingdom—those in Northern Ireland and those in Great Britain. That is what the powers in the order are all about, and that is why I am asking the House to renew its provisions this evening.

The hon. Gentleman raised one issue in particular that I should like to explain. It was in relation to Mr. Rowe's report on the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The hon. Gentleman suggested that my approach was different from that of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Secretary. However, my right hon. and learned Friend's answer of 17 February to which the hon. Gentleman referred was about a different report by Mr. Rowe—his separate report on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991—which was substantially completed before the ceasefire. Indeed, that report did not fully take account of the new situation, but the more recently completed review of the PTA emphatically does so. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take that explanation on board.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), like the hon. Member for Upper Bann, asked for further consideration to be given to judicial involvement in the detention and exclusion procedures. I understand the concerns that lie behind that request. Both hon. Gentlemen said that they were sure that a way could be found to achieve that, but did not identify that way.

That is the difficulty—a real, practical difficulty—to which no solution has been found by any independent reviewers who have considered such matters in the past. It is easy to say, "A way must be found," but less easy to find and identify it. I have examined the matter myself and come to the conclusion that the difficulties in the path of finding the solution are indeed formidable. I do not believe that they could easily be overcome.

There was great strength in the intervention by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King). We must always be keen in these matters to avoid confusing form with substance, and I think that there is a considerable danger of our doing so. Mr. Rowe got it right when he talked in his report about the need to avoid a situation in which a procedure was regarded as judicial simply because the person carrying it out was a judge. There is a great deal of force in that observation.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way, especially as time is short. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) was referring to how the problems were avoided in France where there can be a judicial review with extensive detention. To pray in aid what the right hon. Gentleman said in fact points up the fact that there is a solution if only the Home Secretary looks to France.

Mr. Howard: I confess that I understood my right hon. Friend's intervention in an entirely different way. He was pointing out that we have the substance, which achieves the maximum protection of the liberties of the individual by the strict limit—a matter of days—that we place on detention of this kind, whereas other countries may have more of the form. However, if one looks at the substance and finds that someone can be detained for two years in some circumstances, one can but conclude that this country's approach is far superior on every count, including that of protecting the liberties of the individual.

Mr. Mallon: Is it not the case that, where the judgment is being made on intelligence, not evidence, a judicial review will not work, and that, where the judgment is being made on evidence, there is no call for the judicial review? The problem is that people are being held for seven days, not on evidence but on intelligence.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the entire basis for these provisions. If there is evidence, people are taken before a court and convicted, but, in the kind of emergency that we have been facing, one has to take action against people where there is no evidence that would warrant a conviction, but where there is intelligence on which one must act if one wants to save lives. That is the reason that we take action based on intelligence, and that is why it is not susceptible to a judicial process.

I was sorry that the hon. Gentleman took the line he did, and that he criticised Mr. Rowe and his report. There was no basis for the strictures that he passed on Mr. Rowe, and I hope that he will reconsider his attitude. I fear that the attitude that he displayed demonstrates just how far there is to go before we have a true meeting of minds on the future of Northern Ireland. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reconsider his position.

The speech by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was the most muddled to which the House has been treated for a very long time. He was completely unable to explain why he was inviting his party to vote against the measure. He cannot take issue with its provisions, but is inviting his party to vote against it for a reason that has nothing to do with the measure itself, and nothing to do with the powers contained in the order.

He is inviting his party to vote against it because he says that he wants some different kind of review now, rather than at the appropriate time. It was a disgraceful speech, on a fundamental matter affecting the safety and security of the people of this country, and is explicable only on the basis that the leadership of his party is not prepared to face out those Labour Back Benchers who would never vote for legislation of this kind.

It was not without significance that the only contributions from Back-Bench Labour Members were from those who are opposed root and branch to the legislation. That is the truth that lies behind the fine words of Labour Front-Bench Members. We will not be deflected from our determination to take whatever measures are necessary to protect the lives and security of the people of this United Kingdom. That is why I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 212.

Division No. 98] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Coe, Sebastian
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Rt Hon Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Galle, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCrea, The Reverend William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard

Paice, James
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen

Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 2nd March, be approved.

Appropriation (Northern Ireland)

Madam Speaker: Before we come to motion No. 3, which is also on Northern Ireland, it may be helpful if I make it clear that the debate on the order may cover all matters for which Northern Ireland Departments, as distinct from the Northern Ireland Office, are responsible. Police and security are the principal excluded subjects.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It has already been drawn to your attention that there is a serious problem about common visas. I speak as a member of the Select Committee on European Legislation. The initial recommendation that the matter should be debated on the Floor of the House was made, as is very much the case these days, only after very serious consideration. The matter is now—apparently—to be put before the Council of Ministers for decision very shortly.

I see that, by chance, the Home Secretary happens to be in the House; perhaps he would like to contribute on this point of order. We are given to understand that the matter will not to be debated on the Floor of the House until after the decision has been taken. If that is the case, it is riding roughshod over the Committee. Would you, Madam Speaker, be prepared to comment, as it is a very serious question?

Madam Speaker: I am having inquiries made. I was very concerned about the point of order which was raised this morning. I have been in the Chair for most of the day, but I assure the hon. Member and the House that I am having inquiries made. I think that the situation is rather more complicated than that put to me through points of order. That is why I want chapter and verse on the matter and not simply to listen to what is coming across the Floor of the House. I intend to make a ruling on it tomorrow.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): Would it help, Madam Speaker, if I attempted to shed some extra light on this matter? What is for decision at the Council of Ministers tomorrow is simply the format of the visa, a suggestion that there should be a common format for visas. That was described—I speak from memory and think that I have the gist of it, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) will bear with me if I do not reproduce the exact wording of the document to which he referred—in the document as a technical matter, which is, indeed, precisely what it is. It is a matter of design rather than substance. I hope that that will go some way towards allaying my hon. Friend's anxieties.

7.16 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 14th February, be approved.

The draft order has two purposes. First, it authorises expenditure of £198.2 million in the 1994-95 spring supplementary estimates. That will bring total estimates provision for Northern Ireland departmental services to £6.0221 billion for this financial year. The second purpose is to authorise the vote on account of £2.705 billion for 1995-96. That will enable the services of Northern Ireland Departments to continue until the 1995-96 main estimates are brought before the House later this year.

[Sir John Wheeler]

As you have already remarked, Madam Speaker, the draft order does not cover expenditure by the Northern Ireland Office on law and order and other services. Details of the sum sought are given in the estimates booklet and the statement of sums required on account, which, as usual, are available in the Vote Office. I shall now turn to the estimates.

Some of the votes seek token increases only because new pressures have been offset by savings elsewhere in the vote. To give hon. Members the maximum time to speak, I shall refer only to the main areas where supplementary provision is sought. In the Department of Agriculture's vote 1, which covers expenditure on national agriculture and fisheries support measures, a token increase of £1,000 is required. Some £2 million is for additional uptake under the farm and conservation grant scheme. That is offset by savings in other areas.

In the Department's vote 2, covering local support measures, a net increase of £25.2 million is sought. The vote includes £26.5 million for the agricultural development operational programme, as a result of a higher number of claims than was originally anticipated. There is £700,000 for the disease eradication programme, and £1.3 million represents the carry forward of capital and running costs underspends from 1993-94. Those increases are partially offset by reduced requirements in other areas of the vote.

For the Department of Economic Development, increases are sought in three votes. A net increase of some £19 million is sought in vote 1. That includes £4.7 million for the provision of land and buildings by the Industrial Development Board. That is to meet expenditure on factory buildings for recent inward investment projects, and reflects the continuing success of the board in attracting competitive companies to Northern Ireland. There is £17.7 million for selective assistance to industry, mainly for existing inward investment projects. Also in this vote, £6.5 million is required for the Shorts recapitalisation programme. Those increases are offset by increased receipts totalling £8.5 million from the sale of IDB factories and lands.

In vote 2, a token increase of £1,000 is sought. There will be about £600,000 for the Northern Ireland tourist board to enable it to increase its efforts to promote and market Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. That increase is offset by increased receipts elsewhere in the vote.

The Department of Economic Development's vote 4 makes substantive provision for the expenses incurred in the privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland. Those costs have been met from the second instalment of payments from the Northern Ireland Electricity share issue.

For the Department of the Environment, a net increase of some £5.4 million is sought in vote 1. That includes about £4.3 million for maintenance of the road network and for additional capital works. Some £800,000 is for the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency. Those increases are partially offset by increased receipts, including those for car parking and ferry services. Also in the vote, more than £47 million is appropriated in respect of the sale of Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I have read press reports suggesting that the Government may have to repay to the European Community sums paid to help fund the development of Northern Ireland Airports Ltd. in the past. Can the Minister tell us whether those fears that we may have to repay substantial sums are unfounded or whether they are justified? Is the subject being explored? Indeed, has such a request been made at all?

Sir John Wheeler: As I know, the hon. Gentleman takes an informed interest in Northern Ireland Airports Ltd. I, too, read many things in the newspapers, most of which I do not believe; but if I can give the hon. Gentleman an authoritative answer to his question during the debate, or in correspondence, I shall gladly do so.

In vote 2, covering housing, token provision of £1,000 is sought. The £4.7 million required for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive includes increased resources for maintenance and to offset a fall in rental income from lower than anticipated house sales. Gross housing expenditure in Northern Ireland this year is expected to be about £564 million—£5 million more than in 1993-94.

In vote 4, covering environmental and other services, a net increase of some £3 million is sought. That includes £1.3 million for comprehensive development schemes and various adjustments between programmes. Increased expenditure is partially offset by additional receipts of £2.5 million.

In vote 5, covering office and general accommodation, £5.4 million is for new public building works, alterations and purchases.

For the Department of Education, a net increase of £2.7 million is sought in vote 1. That includes about £4.1 million for grants to education and library boards, mainly for maintenance, minor works and equipment. It also provides for accommodation for Kilkeel high school following an arson attack last year. There is £1.7 million for voluntary schools, mainly for health and safety and for equipment. Those increases are offset by savings elsewhere in the vote.

In vote 2, an additional £5.4 million is sought. About £3 million is for mandatory awards and student loans, reflecting increased demand. There is £1.2 million for universities, mainly for essential equipment, and £400,000 for arts and museums, including the adaptation of premises to improve access and facilities for disabled people. Increases are also required for departmental administration, youth services and the Armagh observatory and planetarium.

For the Department of Health and Social Services, a net increase of £12.9 million is sought in vote 1. That includes £9 million for hospital, community health and personal social services and £6.5 million for capital expenditure. It also includes £1 million to provide help for persons disabled by violence. Those increases are offset by increased receipts and a reduction of £3.4 million in loans provision to trusts.

In vote 3, additional net provision of £2.1 million is required. That includes about £7 million for administration costs caused by increased work loads and capital expenditure. Those increases are offset by reductions elsewhere and by a net increase in receipts of some £4.9 million, mainly from the Department of Social Security for administering the Belfast benefit centre and the Belfast Child Support Agency centre.

Finally, in vote 4, which covers social security, £80.5 million is sought, mainly because of a greater than anticipated demand for income support and disability

benefits, especially attendance and disability living allowances. That is offset by a decrease in income support and family credit.

In my opening remarks I have drawn attention to the main provisions of the order. I hope that, in replying to the debate, I shall be able to do my best to respond to the points raised by hon. Members. If I cannot reply tonight, I shall ensure that the hon. Members concerned receive a response in writing. I commend the order to the House.

7.29 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): It is unfortunate that tonight's debate has been curtailed by the Government. Last year, the corresponding debate went from 4.30 pm to 11.30 pm, whereas today's debate will last for less than three hours. Do the Government think that the concerns of Northern Ireland have decreased so much in the past year? The welcome changes brought about by the peace process mean that we should be devoting more time to discussing the issues, rather than less.

Front-Bench Members must now restrict their remarks so that the elected representatives from Northern Ireland—and other Members who take a keen interest in Northern Ireland affairs—can speak. We note that, during a debate on day-to-day matters of importance to the people of Northern Ireland, there is a remarkable lack of Conservative Back Benchers compared with Opposition Members.

The Government's behaviour in restricting the debate is frankly shabby, and would seem to be motivated more by petty considerations of who was in what Lobby last week than by the serious interests of the Province. In the brief time available, I shall address the order and its implications for the people of Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman's remark to stand on the record. There is no question of this debate being curtailed because of the voting habits of any hon. Member. Such a proposition would be outrageous, and I strongly deny it.

Mr. Spellar: Perhaps in his closing remarks the Minister will be able to tell the House why the Government have curtailed the debate. He will have had adequate time to get an answer to that question.

We must look at what the order means to the people of Northern Ireland, and what the so-called peace dividend will mean. Planted headlines in the Tory-supporting press may claim that

"Ulster people share £160 million peace bonus",

but there is not much to suggest that in the figures.

If Northern Ireland's building employers are to be believed, they are facing a peace deficit. The employers' state of trade survey at the end of 1994 makes for grim reading. There has been a 15 per cent. reduction in construction activity through 1994, and inquiry levels for new work remain below the level required to maintain any significant recovery. The employers estimate that proposed expenditure on new capital projects in the next financial year, 1995-96, will be £427 million.

That represents a fall in cash terms of some £28 million, and a fall in real terms of 8 per cent. It would seem that, far from balancing out the reduction in construction activity arising from the decline in violence, the Government are accentuating it.

We welcome the Minister's recent action—following lobbying not only from builders but from representatives of Northern Ireland's political parties—to try to ensure a more regular flow of work to the construction industry, but that in itself cannot resolve the problem of the reduction in the overall volume of work coming from central Government.

Although it is likely that more private investment will follow the cessation of violence—it appears from the Minister's statement that there are welcome developments there—it now appears that, in the short term, there will be a decline. We recognise that the building industry lives in the short term. Once again, the Government—in their adherence to dogma—seem to be reinforcing the economic cycle, rather than evening it out. Ironically, the Government's actions in the construction industry run counter to their objective of reducing the levels of disadvantage between the communities, as construction has one of the highest levels of employment in the Catholic work force.

The Government have demonstrated once again their inability and unwillingness to plan, and that they have a mental block that prevents them from properly integrating their efforts with funds from outside, such as from the EU structural fund, the EU initiative for peace fund and the International Fund for Ireland. It is clear that people in Northern Ireland are concerned about the lack of any clear strategic plan from the Government to co-ordinate the way in which additional funding could be used. Earlier in the year, local councillors had cause to complain about cuts in the rate support grant which weakened their ability to provide matching funds for European programmes. That shows a lack of understanding of the realities of the financial opportunities which are available.

As the UK experienced in 1945, the major adjustments required by a shift to peace need a planned approach if major dislocation is to be avoided and investment is to be effective. Heaven knows, that investment is needed. Unemployment in Northern Ireland, as has been said many times from this Dispatch Box and elsewhere, is still—despite the recent welcome decline—12.1 per cent. of the work force, compared with 8.4 per cent. in Britain.

Of the 90,000 unemployed, well over half have been unemployed for more than one year. That compares only with the real unemployment black spots of Britain. In some areas, the figures are dramatically worse. In Derry—where I was on Monday—there is 23 per cent. male unemployment, and there are similar figures in Newry and Strabane. We will press the Government strongly to remove the restrictions on targeting investment on the long-term unemployed.

There is no doubt about the need for investment. If we take the vital area of communications, the amount of freight traffic on Northern Ireland's roads is growing by 7 per cent. a year. On the Belfast to Dublin route, it is growing by 20 per cent. a year. The Comptroller and Auditor-General has identified a road maintenance backlog of some £60 million, and the Government's own report on the condition of roads stated that much of Northern Ireland's road network was constructed in the 1960s and is close to the end of its desired life. The Minister rightly stressed the attractions that are needed for inward investment, and an adequate communications infrastructure is vital.

[Mr. Spellar]

On housing, the Government are at last responding, but that is against a background of a slump in the completion of low-cost houses from 4,572 in 1983 to 1,473 in 1993, and in the face of a rising housing list which now stands at 22,740. Quite frankly, the Government would be better served by letting the Housing Executive get on with the job rather than trying to hive off work into agencies and by compulsory competitive tendering.

On energy, the Government should stop being blinded by their rhetoric, and should recognise that many companies are facing steep increases in their electricity bills. The Government should abandon their attempts to set up an electricity pool, which would make matters worse. They should consider whether the Scottish interconnector will create or cost jobs in Northern Ireland. The Government should have a major rethink about an energy policy, and should recognise that they need a policy in the first place. They cannot leave it all to a mythical and non-existent market.

On water, rather than wasting money on expensive consultants' reports which tell them how to hive off each and every water authority activity, the Government should look for investment to reduce the 28 per cent. loss of water caused by leakage from reservoirs through to the consumers. They should take note of the widespread opposition across parties and communities—including the trade unions representing the work force—to the threats to privatise the water industry after the next general election, and also to the potential introduction of water metering as part of a review of the charging procedures.

The Minister may say that all I have discussed up to now involves the public sector and that the Government rightly wish to take the opportunity presented by the peace process to obtain a shift in the balance with the private sector, while recognising that the public sector plays a far larger part in the economy of Northern Ireland than in the United Kingdom as a whole. We endorse that objective, although we point out that the Government do not seem to have an effective short-term strategy for evening out the temporary dislocations of that shift.

What of that main objective to achieve the economic regeneration of Northern Ireland through the private sector? It is very clear that there is a window of opportunity, on which we must capitalise. In the words of the latest respected Coopers and Lybrand report, "Review and Prospects", which is produced each year:

> "Every effort should be made to maximise the opportunities that may arise from the international goodwill displayed towards the Province."

It describes a

> "window of opportunity over the next 12 months to build a foundation for future inward investment."

We all welcomed the investment conference in Belfast in December and we look forward to the conference in Washington in May and hope that it will help to attract inward investment. What the Minister had to say about advance factories was also welcome. The Government must recognise, however, that in the cut-throat and competitive world of inward investment a very strong and positive Government contribution is vital. They should be not merely considering new inward investment, important though that is, but studying the impact of Government measures and assistance on existing industry, which will provide most of any work force increase that helps to cut the horrific unemployment figures.

The Government should be asking the Ministry of Defence whether its ordering programme is helping or hindering the progress of Shorts as a world-class competitor. They should also be talking to the Department of Trade and Industry and asking it what backing it and other Departments will give, given the exciting developments in oil exploration away from the continental shelf into the Atlantic, to ensure that Harland and Wolff gets the contracts for the floating production vessels. What pressure will the Government bring to bear to ensure that the new generation of work comes to Belfast? It will be work not merely for that field but for a whole new generation of oil production developments around the world.

What are the Government doing for the mass of small firms in Northern Ireland to ensure adequate sources of finance to fund expansion? Again, one can see from the Coopers and Lybrand report that constraints on internal finance are one of the main reasons why firms in Northern Ireland have constraints on future investment.

What of the new industries, such as international communications-related industries, which are starting to spring up and to provide employment? The fundamental question is whether the Government will persuade the banks to invest some of the money in Northern Ireland industry that they are throwing away in the casinos of the derivatives market.

There is no doubt that the views of ordinary people in Northern Ireland hover between optimism and apprehension and that they welcome the return to normality and pray for it to become the norm. They recognise the unfinished agenda of jobs, homes, roads, water and energy. They—and we—need positive answers from the Minister tonight, to convince us that the order will begin to deal with those needs. If not, frankly, the Government should give way to a party that will.

7.42 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Department of the Environment vote 1 deals with transport and harbour services. I was pleased to have the opportunity this morning to welcome the Secretary of State for Transport to Larne harbour in my constituency, as he was able to see for himself recent developments which have been completed at a cost of £7 million, assisted by a 50 per cent. European regional development fund grant, under the Department of the Environment's Northern Ireland transport programme.

Larne harbour is well established as the second busiest ferry port in the United Kingdom. Last year, 1,870,751 passengers—nearly 2 million—445,885 cars and caravans and 376,680 commercial vehicles used the modernised port facilities. Those figures represent significant increases in all sectors and reflect the efficiency and reliability of the services which have made Larne Ireland's busiest ro-ro and ferry port, catering for 36 ferry arrivals and departures daily to Ardrossan, Cairnryan, Stranraer and Fleetwood.

Despite all that expenditure and further planned expenditure, however, strong rumours are circulating that the long association of Stena Sealink with the harbour may be severed in the near future and that the company

may relocate its conventional ferry service to Belfast. A few weeks ago I was advised by Stena Sealink that a decision regarding the company's future use of Larne will be made at the end of this month. It has already been announced that Stena Sealink plans to launch a new high speed super-ferry service between Belfast and Stranraer in the spring of 1996.

The developments at the ports of Warrenpoint, Londonderry, Belfast and Larne have all helped to mitigate the peripherality and disadvantages of Northern Ireland, and the substantial investment and European Union grants to the ports have helped Northern Ireland firms quickly to access European markets and have helped to increase tourism to Northern Ireland. The objectives of the grants for port and harbour modernisation have been realised and we now have reliable, economic and efficient services for shipowners, importers and exporters.

I am concerned that one of the key elements of the Department of the Environment's transport development strategy, in giving Larne harbour a complementary role to Belfast as Northern Ireland's principal ro-ro and passenger port, may be thwarted if the rumoured move of Stena Sealink becomes a reality. That concern is widely shared by employees and their families, whose livelihoods depend on employment provided at Larne harbour. Businesses have relocated to Belfast in the past, but after a time the same businesses returned to Larne. If the rumoured relocation of Stena Sealink to Belfast becomes a reality, it will have damaging consequences for the future prosperity of Larne and East Antrim, where hoteliers are currently planning to increase accommodation to cope with an expected upsurge in tourism if the present peace becomes permanent.

I call on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and on Ministers responsible for environment and economic development to initiate inquiries urgently to determine whether the higher average level of European assistance—up to 75 per cent. in the case of trust ports and Belfast port, compared with the 50 per cent. European Union assistance at Larne—has led to, or is leading to, distortions in competition.

Secondly, could business be attracted to ports prior to privatisation through very low tariff charges, perhaps made possible by cross-subsidy, with benefit expected to come on stream after privatisation, to the benefit of the new owners? Will Ministers investigate such charges and whether any inducement is being offered by any Northern Ireland port?

I also call on the Secretary of State and Northern Ireland Ministers to monitor the impact on Northern Ireland ports of the vast sums of money being pumped into the Irish Republic—estimated to be running at the rate of £1 million per day for the next six years—especially when Interreg assistance for maritime links between Wales and the Irish Republic, combined with the profits from duty free sales on ferries, could cause further distortion and competition. Will Belfast harbour privatisation result in the clawback of some European Union grants?

Part II of the Department of the Environment vote 1 deals with roads. On previous occasions, I have mentioned the necessity of upgrading the Larne to Belfast road and I urge the Minister to endeavour to advance the start date for extending the dual carriageway from Gingles corner, Larne, and to follow the example set by the Secretary of State for Transport here and to plan thereafter a succession of phased road developments until we have a dual carriageway all the way between Larne and Belfast. A start is required earlier than the 1997 date that has been promised.

I again appeal for priority to be given to the Carrickfergus to Belfast road project and for genuine sympathy, consideration and compromise to be shown by officials when negotiating with the frontagers whose homes will be severely affected by the necessary road works. The recent and current severe weather conditions in Northern Ireland have highlighted the total inadequacy of the Department of the Environment's road gritting programme in frosty conditions. I therefore ask for a reappraisal of the funding allocated and the inclusion of all school bus routes in regular salt and gritting schedules. Additional funding should be provided for the Department's road maintenance programme and future expenditure plans.

Does the Minister accept that Northern Ireland still has the lowest quality of early-years educational provision in the United Kingdom? Does he agree that children who have access to early-years nursery education or pre-school care and education are likely to achieve higher educational performance, less likely to be become involved in criminal activity in later life, less likely to have contact with welfare agencies, less likely to experience marital breakdown in adult life, and less likely as teenagers to get pregnant and become single parents?

Will the Minister confirm that the promised classroom assistants for Northern Ireland primary schools will be in post by September 1995? Will he confirm that the time allocation to each school will be based on the number of primary-one children of compulsory school age only enrolled at the school? Have the Departments of Finance and Personnel, of Health and Social Services and of Education reached interdepartmental agreement on the future funding of the Northern Ireland Preschool Playgroups Association yet? Can we be assured of equality of funding across Northern Ireland? Is it not disgraceful that in 1994 parents contributed £1 to £2.50 per day while health boards contributed only from 35p a day per child in the generous Eastern board area to as little as 10.4p per day in the Northern board area? [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] Shame, indeed.

How can funding for pre-school play groups in Northern Ireland continue to be kept lower than that received by most groups in England, Scotland and Wales? I hope that the Minister recognises the value of those groups and, in the absence of adequate nursery school provision, will better fund the Northern Ireland Preschool Playgroups Association while seeking to increase nursery school places in Northern Ireland.

I have strong reservations about the system of allocating extra funds to a school's budget for the purpose of targeting social deprivation and educational disadvantage. On what evidence was the decision made to allocate funds to schools based on the number of pupils receiving free meals in those schools? That funding is directing vast sums of money to maintained schools and significantly lesser sums to controlled schools, and is clearly perceived to be discriminating against the controlled sector. I wholeheartedly support the concept of targeting need fairly and equitably, but a more selective method of assessing entitlement to extra funds for social deprivation and educational disadvantage must be quickly found.

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

Construction costs in Northern Ireland have increased significantly of late, with the result that tender prices being returned to education and library boards for capital projects are higher than the present permitted spend level. Will the Minister carry out an early review and raise the ceiling at which education boards can accept tender prices and award contracts? At the same time, could any future moratorium on public spending in the Department of Education be lifted sufficiently early in the financial year to enable permitted expenditure to be incurred?

I pay tribute to the Minister responsible for education for his assistance in enabling Newtownabbey community college to become established smoothly and for providing the necessary funding to meet the needs of pupils and staff of the former Hopefield and Rathcoole high schools when they came together in the newly opened Newtownabbey community college. Will the Minister assure us that, where rationalisation or amalgamation of schools has been agreed by education boards, parents and teachers, he will in future seek to provide the necessary funding for permanent accommodation to be in place at the time of the amalgamation, merger or rationalisation? Such an assurance helps teachers, parents and boards to reach agreement more easily when decisions involving school closures have to be made.

I was amazed recently when, despite the sound advice of principal teachers in Larne and the Carrickfergus area, the needs of a small number of parents resulted in discrimination against the vast majority of the population. The Minister proceeded to announce that there would be another new integrated post-primary schools in east Antrim. The existing schools require substantial capital investment. All existing secondary schools have a measure of voluntary integration at pupil and staff level, which has been developing steadily, slowly and effectively.

The decision to create a new integrated school in an area where a voluntary grammar school, two Roman Catholic maintained schools and a controlled secondary school have closed in the past 10 years, and where more than 600 secondary school places are already vacant, is irresponsible. The decision will threaten the stability of the remaining post-primary schools, whether they be grammar schools, controlled secondary schools or Roman Catholic maintained secondary schools.

The reality, which should not go unnoticed, is that the percentage of Roman Catholic children in the Carrickfergus area is 6.5 per cent. and in the Larne area the total maintained primary school population is 16 per cent. of the school population. So there simply are not enough children to produce an integrated secondary school.

Is the Minister determined to lower enrolment for a viable integrated school, and does the Department of Education expect area boards or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to maintain the same standard? From where will the children be bussed to that new school? Is the Minister prepared to sacrifice the voluntary integration that has already occurred? Will he assure me that the established needs of existing post-primary schools in east Antrim will receive the capital funding they need before money is released for a new integrated post-primary school?

It may be of interest to the House to know, and the Minister should seriously note, how matters are developing. Just the other day, the Braidside integrated primary school in the Ballymena area advertised for a teacher to teach Roman Catholic religious education in an integrated school. I understood that there had been agreement in all the main Churches that there was to be a common religious education curriculum. I do not think that that will be well looked on in Roman Catholic maintained schools, where children would already be having their religious education.

When does the Minister intend to audit the cost to the education service of Northern Ireland of providing free transport beyond the nearest appropriate school? I believe that the Minister will be shocked at the escalating transport costs when he carries out such an audit.

I note that in part II the sum of £416,000 is authorised for expenditure by the Office of Electricity Regulation. In answer to a recent question, I was informed that the transitional relief scheme was introduced to give industry time to adjust to the application of cost-reflective pricing following privatisation, and that it will have served its purpose by the time it ends on 31 March 1996. There is only a year to go, and there is no hope of achieving that.

I must tell the Minister that consumers, whether they be domestic or industrial, are very worried about electricity prices in Northern Ireland and would like greater intervention by the regulator, so if there is not to be an extension of transitional relief to take account of the high costs of electricity in Northern Ireland, perhaps the regulator can find a way.

I urge the Minister to consider carefully and sympathetically the application being made by Nigen for a non-fossil fuel obligation tranche in respect of its energy-from-waste project for Belfast West. The project, when operational at the Belfast West plant, would provide better environmental solutions to the Northern Ireland problem of how best to deal with waste disposal. Approval would also obviate any need for a super-dump at Magheramorne in my constituency and could make possible a major environmental and recreational project for which millennium funding will be sought.

The Prime Minister's investment forum held in Belfast was a credit to all involved in the organisation and to all who participated. We have just lost a further 100 jobs in Larne in my constituency, and my constituents and I are keen to know whether there has been any positive sign that there has been, or is likely to be, additional inward investment as a result of that conference. We in Larne and in East Antrim would like to share in that, as no doubt would other areas of the Province.

Finally, I am sure that other Members present in the Chamber would welcome an explanation of schedule part I, Department of Economic Development, paragraph 4. A sum of £1,000 has been granted, but in the appropriations-in-aid column there is a figure representing an increase of £186,131,000. I should be pleased, as I am sure would others, to know what that has to do with the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland.

8.3 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I was disappointed by the Minister's introduction of the estimates. I thought that he might have discussed the new

economic position in which we might be involved with the advent of peace in Northern Ireland. He might have discussed not only the advent of peace being the absence of violence and therefore giving confidence for economic and commercial development, but the announcement of the various additional fundings that may, and hopefully will, be available for economic development in Northern Ireland; 300 million ecu for 1996, 1997 and 1998, the International Fund for Ireland, structural funds from the EEC in addition to those that already exist and the inward transfer of money from the security budget to other departmental budgets.

I should have thought that the debate was an opportunity to make a statement about the future economic development of Northern Ireland in that new context of peace and of substantial additional funding. It appears to me that Departments of Government, the Industrial Development Board and, to a lesser extent, the Local Enterprise Development Unit and the tourist board, which are the primary job creators in Northern Ireland in the public sector, have no new plans whatsoever regarding that new dimension—that new dispensation. I find that not only surprising but very alarming, because there are about to be made available to us those very substantial fundings, which can be dissipated in short-term, poor projects or wisely invested and garnered to create long-term economic regeneration and more permanent job creation.

Tourism has already taken a distinct upward turn in the past six months. I continue to find it startling that the tourist board does not appear to have restructured its policy and agenda to take advantage of that. We need a regeneration of our tourist infrastructure and a renewal of facilities. Had the Minister done that, it would have been a useful contribution to the debate tonight, but my response to it would have been somewhat different. I would have asked, "Who will share in the economic regeneration?"

The history of the past 25, if not the past 70, years of administration shows that the area that I and others represent—south-east Ulster, roughly the local government districts of Banbridge, Down and Newry and Mourne—has suffered blatant economic discrimination. I wish to know whether the Government, at this very late stage, will take account of that.

When I make that statement, it is often said that I exaggerate the position. I do not begrudge the inward investment in Belfast, the Antrims and Derry, and I wish those people well in their new prosperity, but something more direct and positive must be done for an area that has endemic social and economic deprivation and endemic high unemployment, such as the parts of south-east Ulster that I have named.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way on that subject, because there is greater endemic unemployment in Belfast than in south-east Ulster. Does he accept that, in the latest figures for chairmen and directors, the director of Norbrooke Laboratories leads the list, with a salary of about £750,000 a year? Is that a reflection of poverty in the area?

Mr. McGrady: I do not know whether I welcome the hon. Gentleman's question, because it has confused me. The salary of the chairman of Norbrooke Laboratories is the pay and salary, exorbitant and disgraceful as it is, of one person, not of his employees in the town of Newry. The area that I am referring to is rural, and when there is not sufficient concentration to allow one to see the consequences of unemployment and social deprivation, one tends to think that they do not exist. However, the problems are simply scattered. The numbers are there, the people are there and the suffering is there.

I shall give an example of what has happened in my constituency. I welcome the recent announcements about inward investment, and I hope that those who will benefit from that investment will have long, successful and happy lives. In 1989-90, less than 1.5 per cent. of the total number of potential investors who visited Northern Ireland, visited south-east Ulster. In 1991, the figure was less than 1.5 per cent. and in 1991-92 it was less than 1 per cent. Under the aegis of the IDB or the Local Enterprise Development Unit, the entire area received less than 1 per cent. of visits from inward investors. The last figure that I have is for 1992-93, when there was an "enormous improvement" of 3 per cent. of visits by inward investors for the whole of south-east Ulster. To me, that represents deprivation.

The Industrial Development Board and the Department of Economic Development tell me constantly that they are striving to correct that situation. In his opening remarks tonight, the Minister referred to the sale of industrial development sites. However, no such sites have been provided in the district town of Downpatrick, in spite of much dithering in the past four or five years. According to an advertisement that I saw a few weeks ago, industrial sites are being sold in Newcastle, Ballynahinch, Kilkeel, Warrenpoint and Downpatrick. How can we have economic development if we are losing all the areas that have been designated for that development?

According to the latest information that I have received, the Department of Economic Development and the planning division are playing ping pong with the issue. They cannot sit around the table and work out which industrial sites should be allocated for inward investment.

The Department of Economic Development and the IDB say that they cannot bring investors to the area that I represent because we are too far away from the ports. It is 10 miles from the northern part of my constituency to the centre of Belfast, the biggest port—apart from Larne—in Ireland. There is also a port at Warrenpoint in the south. So that excuse is null and void.

Another excuse that I am given is a valid one. I am told that the road structure is such that it would not encourage inward investors to consider investing in my area. The hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs), who has just made his speech, spoke about completing work on dual carriageways and building new roads in his constituency. He should be thankful that there are dual carriageways in his constituency. We hardly have one single carriageway that is capable of carrying an articulated truck. How can we attract inward investment to areas of deprivation unless we have a programme of infrastructure development to go with it?

I refer specifically to the A7 from Belfast to the district town of Downpatrick and the B8 from there to the port of Warrenpoint. Not one pound of capital moneys has been spent on new road infrastructure in the entire area to which I have referred in the past 14 years. The same was true for many years before that. That is another sign of the lack of commitment on the part of Governments and agencies to the area that I represent.

[Mr. McGrady]

The fishing industry is concentrated in my area, and we all know what is happening to that. Various European Community regulations, the Hague preference, the total allowable catch and the days at sea provision are depressing the fishing industry and are affecting not only the fishermen but the food producers who are dependent on the fish harvest.

Kilkeel in my constituency is the biggest fishing town in Northern Ireland, but the fishermen cannot get in and out of the harbour because the Northern Ireland Harbour Authority will not provide a groyne to keep the boats safe. I welcome the expenditure of £6 million on another part of Northern Ireland for pleasure purposes, but I think that £3 million could be provided to establish a groyne for the economic fishing base in the harbour and the port of Kilkeel.

That development has not taken place because the Government will not finance the Northern Ireland Harbour Authority to carry out that work. The authority proposes to levy the fishermen to pay for the project, but their income is running down rapidly and they cannot afford to pay. I witnessed a good fishing boat being burnt on a beach in County Down because the owners could no longer afford to run it. That is the extent of the deprivation in that community.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am sure that he will recall that when the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs visited Kilkeel—the hon. Gentleman organised that visit, as the local Member—Committee members were appalled to learn that, because of the difficulties at the harbour, the fishermen were losing more than £200,000 in revenue each year.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I agree with what he says, but in fact the losses are much greater than that if the fishermen are prevented from going to sea for weeks on end.

I see that you are watching the clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as my time is running out, so I shall conclude my remarks. We can see the same pattern of non-funding in other areas. It was announced last week that some £63 million will be spent on school rehabilitation programmes, but not a penny will go to my entire area—except the money which the Minister announced tonight for the rehabilitation of a Kilkeel school which suffered an arson attack.

Because of the time constraints, I cannot comment in detail about hospitals and the provision of social services. New hospitals have been built in Antrim, Moyle, Derry, Belfast and Coleraine, yet the hospitals which serve my area have been in a queue for funding for 30 years. They have not yet received a penny, in spite of many promises. That pattern of non-funding cannot be denied. I would supply other evidence of lack of funding, but time does not permit me to do so.

The people of my area have strived to live together and we have worked hard. We have cast out from our community the men of violence and those who espouse the cause of violence for political purposes. We have accepted, by and large—there are always hiccups in every community—the diversity of political opinion and religious belief, and we have lived together. If we had blown one another apart, money would be flowing into the area, but because we have lived together like ordinary, decent people, supported one another and kept out the men of violence, we are ignored and neglected.

I will make one final request of the Minister and abandon the rest of what I had hoped to say. Will he take a message back to the Departments of the Northern Ireland Office—because he has overall charge of finance and personnel—and ask them to set up a task force for economic regeneration similar to the ones that are set up when jobs are lost in other areas? Our area never had the jobs in the first place. We would love to be facing the loss of 100 jobs; we do not have 100 jobs to lose. We want a fair share of the cake and of the development and the funding that will accompany the new era of peace and economic development. If the Minister can provide that, we shall be able to fulfil our commitment to provide jobs, reasonable wages and an adequate standard of living for the people of Down and south-east Ulster.

8.18 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I can understand much of the frustration expressed by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) about the lack of industrial investment and of Government finance in his area. If the hon. Gentleman believes that he has problems, he had better listen to me because there are plenty in the constituency which I have had the honour of representing in this place for the past 12 years.

I shall develop some of the important themes on which hon. Members have already touched. The vote on the Department of Economic Development certainly involves matters that must be considered and attended to.

The first vote concerns the Department of Agriculture. I come from and represent not only a farming home but a farming constituency. The farming community has been the backbone of Ulster's economy and prosperity over the years. It has been through rather difficult times and still faces grave difficulties—for example, grave concern has been expressed to me recently on behalf of pig farmers, especially those with farms of smaller unit size, about the viability of their units in future.

The matter has been raised in Europe. The European Commissioner has money to assist pig farmers, but I am told that he has stated that they must depend on market forces. I have heard that before. Having said that farmers must depend on market forces and take their place at the whim of the market, in the next breath the Commissioner tells us that those same farmers are not permitted to buy cereals on the world market, but must buy dearer cereals from Europe. Farmers in the Province find those cereal prices exorbitant and colossal, and they add to the burden placed on the agricultural sector of our community.

The same vote applies to the fishing industry. I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members have received numerous representations on behalf of the fishing industry which is under threat, particularly from the recent decision taken in the House and another place concerning the Spanish fleet.

As that decision was taken in Europe, will the Minister assure the House tonight that the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for the Department of Agriculture will seek to gain extra money from Europe to permit appropriate decommissioning of fishing vessels without taking money out of the fishing budget? I am led to

believe that there is a limited budget and that the money that should go into the fishing industry will be used for schemes such as that mentioned by the hon. Member for South Down—the harbour in Kilkeel. That is essential money which should be provided.

The fishermen face one of the greatest challenges they have ever faced. They have to cope with depleting stocks and financial problems as they try to keep their families. It is disgraceful and despicable that inadequate provision is made for the Kilkeel fishermen and the harbours. I join the hon. Member for South Down in asking the Minister to provide that money.

It is appropriate to say that the present Minister with responsibility for agriculture is one of the first Ministers to have gone to Europe to fight for the position of farmers in Northern Ireland; it must be placed on record that that is appreciated. It would be remiss of me to say that there is a need for assistance but no representations are being made; the noble Lady certainly fights our corner. I hope she knows that right hon. and hon. Members will back her if she continues to fight for appropriate finances to meet the needs of the fishing industry, bearing in mind the serious challenges that it faces.

Under the same agricultural budget, I should mention the changes that have been recommended at Loughery agricultural college, in my constituency. I attended a deputation to the Minister but, unfortunately, it seems that the decision has been taken. I genuinely feel that that decision is detrimental to the interest of the Cookstown area, which has the second highest unemployment rate in the United Kingdom. The decision is regarded as a blow not only to teaching staff but to ancillary staff and local services. Many small businesses relied on Loughery agricultural college and its vibrant college campus as a means of income.

Moving on to the Department of Economic Development, I have listened to much of the talk about the peace dividend. There seems to be plenty of verbiage and witty talk and it all sounds good. It is wonderful to hear so many wonderful promises. If I believed in all the amounts of money that are supposed to be rolling into Ulster, I would not know what road to keep off, as so many tonnes of pounds and punts would be arriving—perhaps we will not get punts; they are getting them in rather than giving them out, but there would be dollars and all the rest coming in because of the so-called peace dividend.

Who will enjoy this so-called new prosperity? I have already said that I understand the fears and frustrations of the hon. Member for South Down, but, in some ways, he has to thank his own party leader, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), for the current position. When the hon. Gentleman goes to America, although he leads a particular party, he is very good at mentioning a certain part of Foyle, but he is not so helpful or good at assisting his colleagues when it comes to investment. We have listened to plenty of media coverage about how many jobs are coming from America to the Province, especially through the efforts of the hon. Member for Foyle. Perhaps the hon. Member for South Down should tap his hon. Friend on the shoulder and tell him not be so selfish.

Mr. McGrady: I should like to endorse the hon. Gentleman's magnificent tribute to the leader of my party for his great endeavours in raising funds in America and spearheading the Trojan fund in Europe. He should take on board the point that these funds are paid through Government Departments and the International Fund for Ireland and are not at the personal disposal of any individual Member of Parliament.

Rev. William McCrea: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Perhaps he should wait for the rest of the comments before he starts thanking and congratulating his hon. Friend. After all these trips to America, we are still told by the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), representing Her Majesty's Opposition, about the vast and terrible unemployment of what he called the Derry area; it is actually Londonderry. Perhaps the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman needs some extra education about the part of the country he is in.

The hon. Member for Foyle has been promising plenty, but it is all promises. In actual fact, there has been little substance. Earlier in the debate, we discussed the difference between substance and the rest, but here we are told that the hon. Member for Foyle has brought in a certain number of jobs. Strabane is in the same constituency. The Bogside area of Londonderry would have a chance of getting some benefit, but Strabane has little of the prosperity from America or anywhere else, never mind places as far down the country as South Down, where there are problems that the hon. Member for South Down needs to talk over with his hon. Friend the Member for Foyle.

In the debate in July 1994 on economic development, I raised a matter concerning Omagh. I received a letter from the Minister after the debate pointing out that IBB had recently acquired a 26-acre site at Doogary. When will a factory be completed on the site, and when is it hoped that its occupant will commence operations, thus giving gainful employment to local people?

What steps is the Department of Economic Development taking to enhance employment in the Cookstown area? I attended a meeting with the divisional planning officer and one of my constituents just over a week ago, requesting the development of land near Killymoon. Surely the Government must show an active interest in getting industrial development into the area. How many major firms have shown an interest in moving into that region of high unemployment?

Education standards in the Cookstown area are among the highest in the Province. Young people are able, ready and willing to rise to the challenge, but the town desperately needs hope because of its high unemployment. The Castlederg area, for instance, continues to worry me. Previous Ministers spoke in glowing terms about new possibilities for the area; a special report was commissioned, and civil servants were deputed to examine the area's needs. My constituents, however, want not promises but action.

What has happened since we last discussed these matters? What industrial developments have taken place in Omagh, Cookstown and Castlederg? The Government must bear some responsibility for the sense of hopelessness felt by a number of people. Instead of adding to employment, the Government have caused the closure of Omagh's maternity unit, thus removing jobs from the area. They have not given the signal that they are backing industrial investment and development in the area and ensuring that essential services are in place. The maternity

[Rev. William McCrea]

unit was excellent, but the Government have closed it. They have also run down in-patient mental health institutional treatment by cutting staff numbers.

Since our last debate, the Department has decided to remove Cookstown's rates office. Rather than assisting employment in the area, it has moved civil servants away from an unemployment black spot. Councillor William Larmour and I had a meeting with the senior officer, Mr. Gallagher, who expressed grave concern; but this appears to be Government policy.

We made a suggestion at that time, because we had heard that housing benefit administration was being centralised. There is excellent office accommodation in Cookstown, which will now be left empty; that could have been used. Geographically, Cookstown is the centre of the Province, so such action could not have been described as isolationist. After I raised the matter, however, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), wrote me a letter including the following statement:

"As for Housing Benefit, Mr. Gallagher assures me that Cookstown was, indeed, one of the locations considered for the proposed centralised office. However"—

the first part always cheers one up, but the next bit tramps one down into the ground—

"a detailed assessment of the pros and cons of siting in a provincial town, rather than Belfast, has concluded that Belfast offered more advantages, especially in terms of availability of staff with Housing Benefit experience, proximity to the main body of claimants in the greater Belfast area, communication and greater flexibility in the efficient management and use of staff."

I am told on the highest authority that there is no reason why the housing benefit office could not be centralised in the accommodation in Cookstown, which has just been upgraded. It seems, however, that it must be in Belfast. When it suits the Government, they will remove civil servants from Belfast and send them to Londonderry; if they can move them as far from Belfast as that, why can they not move them to excellent accommodation in Cookstown, in the centre of the Province?

The Government's action gives the wrong signal to incoming industrialists. If they are not interested in retaining services—and civil servants—in the area, what encouragement does that give to those who look for Government commitment? What have the Government kept in that area? Instead of showing commitment by introducing jobs, they are withdrawing them. That does not give the green light for prosperity; it gives the red light to industrialists, telling them to keep away.

That is a serious mistake by the Government. I appeal to the Minister of State to ask his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to look afresh at the centralisation of housing benefit arrangements: excellent accommodation is available for staff to walk into. The Government tell us how sad they are that the Cookstown area has the second highest unemployment rate in the Province, but they are taking jobs away and adding to its problems.

I have mentioned Castlederg. It was announced yesterday that Derg Valley hospital was to be closed. Again, rather than offering encouragement to an area with employment problems, the Government offer hopelessness. The hospital serves elderly people who provided the backbone in the creation of the health service, bringing prosperity to the Province: they paid their taxes and national insurance, and were told that the state would look after them in the later days of their lives. Now state provision in Castlederg has been withdrawn from elderly people, and is being handed over to the voluntary or the private sector.

I have no objection to the voluntary sector, which should be encouraged to become vibrant; nor do I object to the private sector. I do not believe, however, that the Government have the right to withdraw from their responsibility to look after the old and the sick. Again, the Government commissioned special reports on Castlederg's needs; I wonder what they cost. In the end, rather than sending a message that they were backing the hospital and those who were willing to put their money where their mouth was, the Government withdrew the services that it provided.

Economic development and the Bann are connected issues. As has been said, we need an infrastructure programme. We need roads. I understand the feelings of the hon. Member for South Down, who sees motorways, dual carriageways and a mass of lit-up roundabouts in other parts of the Province. All that is wonderful; perhaps part of the rest of the Province can enjoy some of it, too. Perhaps we can ensure that the industries that come to Mid-Ulster can get their goods to the ports quickly.

Remember, Cookstown is a central part of the Province. There is a bottleneck in Cookstown because it needs a bypass. Magherafelt needs a bypass. Why is the money that is rolling in not used to remove the bottlenecks in Magherafelt, Cookstown and Omagh, allowing the industries that come out to the west of the Bann to get their goods to the ports as quickly as possible? The Omagh area badly needs stage 3 of the through-pass, yet I am told that it is not on the priority list.

I appreciate the progress that has been made in stages 1 and 2, but without stage 3 it is ineffective. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) used his influence in another place to have the road recognised as a trans-European highway. I mentioned that in the previous debate and I shall keep mentioning it. It is lovely to get the trans-European highway. It sounds good, but it must be able to carry the vehicles. It must be capable of encouraging industries to come into the area. Without stage 3 in Omagh, the commercial and agricultural life of the Tyrone county town will be strangled.

Another by-product of not having that through-pass is that land earmarked on the 2002 plan cannot be developed. It is landlocked. Without the development of the third stage of the through-pass, it will continue to be landlocked. House prices are unacceptably high in Omagh town. I urge the Minister to treat the matter with urgency and seriousness and to place stage 3 on the Department's priority list so that work can commence at the completion of stage 2. It is vital that Cookstown gets a bypass and that it follows on to the bypass in Magherafelt. A small area of the road network needs help to assist the industrial development of our area.

I must press one other matter, which is outside my particular area, but it does follow on. There is an excellent road from Londonderry to Castledawson roundabout and on to Toome. Unfortunately, there is a bottleneck at Toomebridge. A dual carriageway is needed from Toomebridge to the M2. I genuinely believe that that

would be of great assistance. If all this money means anything, let it be put into something productive, which would help the industrial development of our community.

In Omagh recently, Queen's university announced that it would operate a faculty unit in the technology centre. I urge the Minister earnestly to consider allowing the Department of Education to take over the former Tyrone and Fermanagh hospital. It has 3,000 sq m of excellent buildings, which have recently been refurbished to a high standard. It is an historic building. It is situated in a mature campus ground of more than 300 acres, with student accommodation, recreation halls, outdoor sports facilities and other excellent amenities. It is sitting there for the university to take up. Surely it should be considered as a campus site at a European level. That would be a great advancement educationally and economically for the western area.

My constituents face many problems. I believe that it is vital that the House gives due consideration to them. We must ensure that there is less rigid planning in the countryside. The farming community is not able to allow its sons and daughters to build in the countryside, and we need to consider that.

Pre-school nursery education has been mentioned. There is a tremendous lack of it within the community.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) mentioned the extra funds that were allocated between the maintained and the controlled sector.

We were told that we had to put up Irish signs so that people could read in Irish as well as English. I read something very interesting in the paper today. I read that this person, Adams, the Sinn Fein president, went to the Arran Islands at the weekend. The article says:

"He opened his address to the crowded hall in Irish but then, admitting that his knowledge of the first tongue wasn't the best, switched to English."

And he has the audacity and the front, which the Government drank hook, line and sinker, to say that we should spend public money, at a time of great restriction, and put up Irish signs, which fewer than about 3 per cent. of the people can read. Even Adams himself, who is paraded all around America as the great hero, cannot read Irish. He started his speech in Irish and then had to apologise that he knew nothing about it. That is not the only thing that he knows nothing about.

There is a great need for expenditure in the Province. My constituency needs it, as do other hon. Members' constituencies. I am not saying that mine should get more than others, but I do believe that, in the past, my constituency has not had its fair share. I believe that we have a right to demand that it does.

8.46 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I hesitate to talk about the roads and new industry that I have in my constituency. Perhaps I should mention them briefly, as time is going on.

The policy on the sale of Housing Executive houses is good; people like to own their own homes. But it has created a difficulty, as the houses that are sold are beside Housing Executive houses that have not been sold. Unfortunately, the Housing Executive does not keep the area in a good condition. That, unfortunately, means that people who have bought their own homes live in a "through-other" area, as we say in Northern Ireland and cannot sell their homes. That is extremely unfair on those house owners. It is about time that the Housing Executive got its act together and did something about that.

The Housing Executive should also look at some of the objectionable neighbours that it puts into its houses. Perhaps I should explain what I mean by that. Unfortunately, we have in Northern Ireland what are known as "druggies" houses, where people dispense drugs. The people who live in them fortify their houses in such a way that, if they are suspected of having drugs and the police arrive, by the time the police get into the house the drugs have been burnt—in a fire that is always burning, both winter and summer.

It is also known that certain flats contain animals that are not supposed to be kept. We know of flats in which two large rottweilers are kept in the one flat, simply to keep out the law, if it happened to come along. It is time that the Housing Executive, the police and the Northern Ireland Office got together to see whether some way can be found to sort out that problem, because it is very serious in certain areas.

A more mundane but no less important matter is that the coal advisory service is changing, because of the privatisation of British Coal. How will the solid fuel boilers and flues and so on be looked after? I hope that that matter will be looked at quickly and seriously.

Northern Ireland still has giro drops, which do not seem to be understood in some circles, and they must be investigated. If legislation is required, it should be introduced. I would accept a letter from the Minister, as well as a few remarks in reply at the end of the debate. Perhaps he could have a look at why grants are processed so slowly. I think that it takes about 12 months to get a Housing Executive grant.

A Bill relating to pensions is currently in the House of Lords. Part of that Bill will not apply to Northern Ireland and I assume that the legislation will be brought in by order. Perhaps the Minister will let me know whether that is so. An important aspect of that Bill is how trustees are selected to represent pensioners. I should like the legislation changed so that pensioners can democratically elect their trustee rather than have one appointed.

In the past I have had some knowledge of water privatisation, and I am rather concerned that it is still being visualised for Northern Ireland. Of course, there may be a change of Government and it may fall by the wayside. I am quite sure that, if the Opposition become the Government, they will not privatise. Northern Ireland has an excellent water system. Belfast water commissioners were renowned throughout the world and, usually, the operation was run by local councillors. That was an excellent idea and it would be a great pity if the system were changed. We, of course, oppose the privatisation of water in Northern Ireland.

The Department of the Environment vote 1 deals with roads. I support the aim of my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) to complete the dual carriageway to Larne. I was rather afraid to mention that, because colleagues have different views on roads in Northern Ireland. I should certainly like to see the dual carriageway finished. Perhaps I could make a local plea for the A26 between Antrim and Ballymena.

I was interested in a letter from the Minister with responsibility for the environment in Northern Ireland to my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr.

[Mr. Clifford Forsythe]

Ross). It referred to EC funding for unadopted roads. I have several times mentioned such roads in the House and I hope that they are being looked at, because the issue needs to be sorted out. I hesitate to get into mundane matters such as those involving travellers and gipsies camping on lay-bys. However, in a year in which the resource element to councils has been cut, it is not right to have 40 or 50 caravans parking on a DoE lay-by and then leaving. I estimate that the cost of clearing up and putting right the damage to the site would probably be about £600, and that does not include farmers' fencing and so on that was badly damaged and burned. It is time that that was examined and perhaps an effort made to make sure that only those with a legitimate reason for parking for a short time are looked after.

I spoke about councils. Ratepayers are complaining because, no matter what percentage the councils put on the rate, the regional portion is always much greater. For instance, if the council adds 3 per cent., the regional rate is generally about 9 per cent. and is portrayed as 6 per cent. Councillors have to carry the can for that 6 per cent. when they put on only 3 per cent. That is most unfair to councillors, most of whom do a good job with what they have.

I am pleased at the number of new industries that have come to my area. I congratulate the Industrial Development Board on its good work along those lines. I hope that difficulties that have been mentioned in the newspapers about other projects are overcome and that new industries will come to the Province as quickly as possible.

I am a bit concerned about vote 2 of the Department of Economic Development, because the tourist grants, to which we are now paying much attention, seem to be causing difficulty. I had a couple of cases in which the grants seemed to take a long time to come through. There seems to be an inclination to give grants for hotels and other projects coming into Northern Ireland rather than to the entrepreneurs in the Province who are trying to start up their own hotels and the like.

In the context of the privatisation of Belfast international airport, we are opposed to the privatisation of air traffic control. There was a suggestion to that effect, although I think that the idea has been deferred. We support those in the rest of the United Kingdom who are totally opposed to the privatisation of the air traffic control system. It is essential to have confidence in those systems, and they should remain as they are.

I have a criticism related to tourism which involves an airport outside Northern Ireland. I hope that I am not ruled out of order for mentioning it. We have an excellent new airline which started last week and uses Stansted airport. I had the unfortunate experience of sitting for hours in a plane on an apron at Stansted because it appeared that the proper de-icing equipment, or enough of it, was not available. There certainly did not seem to be enough snow clearing equipment and there was only 1 in of snow on the runway. Perhaps the Minister would speak to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport about that.

Sir John Wheeler: I may be responsible for what happens to every blade of grass in Northern Ireland, but I am not responsible for Stansted airport. However, I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Mr. Forsythe: I thank the Minister for that. The spirit of co-operation would be helped if we had more tourists coming through Stansted to Northern Ireland.

I had intended to make a few comments about the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland, but I shall restrict them. One of them is about family credit, which does not seem to be taken up because of the large amount of paperwork involved. People who send in pay slips, as they are supposed to do, find that they either get lost, are out of date or are the wrong ones. They do the same thing again. I know people who, even though they need the money, stop trying to get it. If the benefit is there, it is only right that people who deserve to receive it should do so. The fact that it may be difficult for some people should be considered.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) wants to discuss health matters. It has been reported to me that, in certain parts of Northern Ireland, people over 75 years of age are being directed to geriatric-type hospitals instead of to normal hospitals. Apparently, those people do not have much going for them. I am sure that the Minister will draw attention to that.

The National Playing Fields Association is issuing information on a multi-game wall where one plays all sorts of games. If one has a small area, one can put up such a wall and kick a ball against it, or play basketball and cricket. That is a good idea. If there is no room for a proper sports ground, erecting such a wall should be considered. I remember as a boy kicking a ball against a wall. It did me no harm. I recommend that to the Minister.

9 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I am conscious of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on Northern Irish colleagues' time allocation in this debate, so I shall be brief.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) concentrated on agriculture for a large part of his speech. The Minister mentioned that the Government are seeking to spend only £1,000 extra in the agriculture sector.

Within the past couple of months, the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs has taken evidence in public from the Ulster Farmers Union and the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland. One point emerged: the importance of agricultural employment in Northern Ireland.

As the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster said, that has been a backbone of Northern Ireland's economy. There has been a drop in employment in that sector. Although that drop is mirrored throughout Europe, it is considerable. For instance, in the early 1970s, 10 per cent. of civil employment was due to agriculture; now it is 6.4 per cent.

Agriculture is still a considerable source of employment, but the position could still be better. When we were taking evidence in public from the Department of Agriculture in Northern ireland, one of the points I asked about was the capacity for developing the principle of co-operation in farming.

There are a large number of one-person or two-person farms in Northern Ireland, so surely the capacity is there to bring the farming communities back together in co-operative ventures. They may have all sorts of names and undertake all sorts of activities in various aspects of farming, but the potential is to develop that principle of co-operation. At one point, it was mentioned that the Northern Ireland farming community seemed to be apprehensive about co-operative ventures, but other organisations in the farming community did not accept that.

I also asked whether co-operation was valued as a principle by DANI. It is a hard world. Commitment to a particular principle is a measure of how much of DANI's allocation for its activities has been devoted to developing the principle of co-operation in the farming community.

The answer I received was that £300,000 per year was allocated for the development of co-operative ventures in the farming community. That is not a lot. I should like the Minister to take on board the view that, if co-operation can improve efficiency—that is what the modern world is all about—I for one would like greater priority given to encouraging co-operative ventures in Northern Ireland.

I have picked up some concerns in relation to the Department of Economic Development. Some of them might just be perceptions, as is often the case in Northern Ireland, but perceptions must be dealt with.

We are all in favour of inward investment. We have to listen only to our colleagues from Northern Ireland to see how much that is needed, but a feeling exists that, in the drive and enthusiasm to encourage such investment, somehow the indigenous companies are being left out on a limb and ignored. That is not being done in a deliberate or culpable way, but those companies are being left to wither on the vine.

All hon. Members should agree that, if an indigenous company is operating and a competitor comes in that is supported by the public purse, that surely gives the competitor an unfair advantage over the indigenous company. We all should be in favour of, and should encourage, inward investment, but we should be careful to ensure that we do not endanger the secure basis of the indigenous companies in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster and my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) mentioned Kilkeel fishing village. In an intervention on my hon. Friend, I mentioned that the Kilkeel fleet was tied up because of the harbour entrance, and that more than £200,000 would be lost to the local economy. I am not sure whether I said £200,000 a year, but the briefing is clear that the loss would be £200,000 a week. Kilkeel loses a massive amount of money per week because of that.

It was extremely generous of the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster to support my hon. Friend the Member for South Down in mentioning it. Generous gestures can sometimes be thin on the ground in Northern Ireland, because, obviously, rivalry exists between constituency Members of Parliament. It is to the hon. Gentleman's credit that he mentioned that.

The position at Kilkeel impressed me greatly. Here were successful people and who were willing to work, to get on with it and, through their own efforts, to get on in the world and to contribute to the Province, yet the harbour at Kilkeel left a lot to be desired.

I have another document on port spending by the Department of the Environment. I am not complaining about any expenditure, because clearly more expenditure is required. I saw what was happening at Kilkeel and then saw the spending of the port section of the Department of the Environment on the royal harbour at Donaghadee and on Newry harbour, and the assistance to Moyle district council for ports at Rathlin and Ballycastle harbours and elsewhere.

Although Kilkeel is certainly pressing its own case, and rightly so, I have still not received a satisfactory answer as to why it has been left. In view of the all-party support for Kilkeel, I should like to hear from the Minister at some point how Kilkeel harbour is regarded by the Government.

I am conscious of the lack of time available to Northern Irish colleagues on the Floor of the House, so I conclude my remarks at this point.

9.8 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) and think that the Minister will confirm that I, too, feel strongly that the promotion of home-based industry is best. Home-based industries are tied to the place, and do not pick up their belongings and leave when the going gets difficult. In that context, I support what the hon. Gentleman said. Some might offer reasons why Portavogie and Kilkeel, as fishing ports, have not been properly looked after.

Roads have been mentioned, and I could spend some time talking about a generous letter I received from the Minister responsible since I raised the matter of traffic flow in Belfast. In his letter, he tells me that the inner Belfast box is now scheduled to open in 1999, providing funds are available. It has been going on since the early 1970s and is not yet completed. We are talking about the capital of Northern Ireland, with the emphasis in the Great Victoria street area on attracting people with an outstanding hotel complex at the Europa, while, a little way down the road, there is land that has been vacant for years.

Vote 2 deals with the Department of Education, and I shall refer to a particular constituency issue. It has been brought to my attention that the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, which is headquartered in my constituency, is to be reorganised. Will the Minister tell me now, or later in writing, what will be the duties of the four sub-committees and the duty of the main committee?

It seems that someone has been charged with reorganising the Sports Council on the grounds that it was in a mess, although I had not heard that description of it hitherto. The suggestion that it has to work in a particular way or there would be no funding especially concerns me, because it was made in the context of the Special Olympics. Those who know the work that people such as Evelyn Greer have done with Mencap over the years will understand my concern.

Will the Minister assure us that young people will be encouraged to take part in the Special Olympics, and perhaps explain why there has been a breakdown in communications? It seems that people with disabilities in Northern Ireland prefer to take part in the wider United Kingdom games.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

I refer now to the Department of Health and Social Services, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) said, is my more familiar subject of interest.

I have several concerns about vote 1. I understand, for example, that money from the national lottery intended for community purposes is to be held and distributed by NICVA, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Authorities. What safeguards are in place to ensure that small charities will get their fair share, and that members of NICVA do not favour their pet projects? I ask that deliberately because I know that there have been difficulties in the past. If funds are now being channelled through NICVA, I want a clear understanding that distribution will be equitable.

In the past year, and indeed before, there has been much discussion in the House about changes in the health service and the increase in the number of GP fundholders. It was argued that they would become strong players in the purchasing of services, but I wonder how far the concept has spread in Northern Ireland. Is there any significant evidence that it is spreading?

A few weeks ago, I was invited to visit a practice in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker). It was an inner-city practice, where the doctors were completely sold on the concept of fundholding.

They made bold to claim that in their practice, they had no real waiting lists. They said that they had been able to break the stranglehold that some consultants had on the choice of patients. On occasions, they had made choices not simply on clinical grounds, but on other grounds.

I was fascinated to discover this, because one of the arguments propounded in the House is that fundholding does not work in inner cities. The doctors in this practice, in an inner-city area of deprivation which crosses the community, asked me to put on record their experience of fundholding.

From the answers to my parliamentary question of 2 March, I see that trauma and orthopaedic operations in the Musgrave Park hospital showed a marked decrease of 300 cases between 1992 and 1993. However, between 1993 and 1994, there was a dramatic increase of more than 400 cases.

Is there a reason for the fluctuations? Is it the heralded power of the GP fundholders, or does the increase reflect the hospital's ability to attract patients from elsewhere in Northern Ireland—and even, because of the skills of the staff there, from other parts of the United Kingdom? Is the hospital dealing with matter efficiently enough to bring down the waiting list in orthopaedics?

Still on vote 1, can the Minister say whether the Causeway hospital at Coleraine will be affected by the finances set aside for capital expenditure? There is some concern that the demands of Belfast trust hospitals will have an adverse impact on the Causeway development. A laboratory site has been provided. I would not like to think that there would be no further development for some years while capital funding was diverted to Belfast because the Causeway hospital was in the queue much earlier.

I have two concerns about vote 4. The first is a mobility allowance for under-fives. I appreciate that this is an aspect of the social security system in Great Britain. It is fascinating that, when I send a letter on social security policy to the Social Security Department here—I normally send a copy to the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland—I get a note from the Great Britain Department to the effect that this is a matter for the Northern Ireland Department. The Department passes the shuttlecock over. I therefore have no hesitation in raising the matter in a Northern Ireland appropriation debate.

Many in the House may not be aware of the Government's bizarre rule that disabled children under five are not entitled to the mobility allowance available to those over five years of age. The argument has been that children under five cannot get the allowance because, until they are over five, one cannot be sure whether they will walk.

Parents with disabled children under five have enough problems to cope with, without being denied financial support, especially when it is denied because, according to the Government, it cannot be proved before that age whether a child will walk. I urge the Government and the Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services, if it is a matter for that Department, to take the lead and to cease discrimination on such petty grounds. The inability to walk is not set forth as the only ground for mobility allowance.

My second point was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe)—the time taken before people receive housing grants and social security payments. Often some time elapses before people come before a tribunal. They then go through the agonising period of wondering what will happen. There is also a tendency not to look ahead during the review process.

Recently, a constituent went to cash his cheque. He knew that his book was finished, but he then discovered that it could not be renewed, and that instead, he would be paid by giro until he went again before a medical assessment board. The man was fair-aged. The law of averages says that, far from improving over the age of 70, people are inclined to go downhill.

I could not understand why the administration had not booked him in earlier for that medical review, so I raised the issue with the Department. The review is not to take place until at least the end of March, yet the man has not received his cheques for January and February.

We all know that, after a tribunal or a medical review, it takes time to write up the notes and for those notes to get back to the administrative executive. Indeed, the internal postal system is even worse than the postal system from which at times we suffer in Westminster. Meanwhile, people are left high and dry without their proper benefits. It is not enough to say that they will be paid in due course, for people on low incomes have to pay their bills promptly. Only large businesses can afford not to pay bills on time. The ordinary person has to pay the bill, or there will be a row. Will attention be given to that matter?

Before I sum up, I have one concern over vote 5, which involves the costs of funerals. The Minister may be aware of the increasing costs of burial, not only in Northern Ireland but throughout Great Britain. I question whether the available grant covers the cost of a decent funeral. I hope that we shall not return to the pauper's burial.

Mr. McGrady: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the circumstances of burial in Northern Ireland are quite

different from those in England and Wales, and that, potentially under the new rules, burials will be more expensive? Around 84 per cent. of funerals in Northern Ireland are interments, and only 14 per cent. are cremations. There are only two crematoria in Northern Ireland, so long distances have to be travelled and much expense incurred by many people. There is an additional problem in the north.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the hon. Member's intervention and thank him for it, as it was perhaps more helpful than my intervention in his speech. Although I am arguing about the Northern Ireland appropriation order, increasing costs of burial also affect people in the nation as a whole. I certainly concur, however, that there are added expenses in Northern Ireland.

On a more general note, I welcome the publication of the chief medical officer's report. In that document, she highlights areas of concern, and I shall comment on two of them.

It is alarming that 20 per cent. of patients fail to keep their hospital out-patient appointments, which incurs a subsequent loss in the Departments. Is there a communication problem? Are the patients not aware of their appointments? I know that patients are sometimes told of their appointments a long time in advance, but I wonder whether there is a chance that, just as for in-patients, people get their appointments at the last minute and that they are out on business on the day that they are supposed to report to hospital.

Could it be, however, that many out-patients arrive on time for their appointments but get fed up and go home when the department is running an hour or more behind schedule? Despite improvements in the system, I have faced that scenario myself. Certainly, the inability to connect a patient with his or her clinic is a substantial waste of health service resources. What efforts have been made to find out why that is happening, and to sort the problem out?

Also in the chief medical officer's report, there is evidence that asthma is the main cause of ill health in children and young people. The Minister will be aware that air pollution is considered a major contributory factor in asthma, which is one of the fastest growing diseases in children. Will the Minister ensure that finance is set aside and research encouraged so that the causes of the increases are identified and eradicated? It is not good enough to say that the cause of asthma is unknown and that there are many exacerbating factors in the environment. We need more detailed research.

9.24 pm

Mr. Spellar: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate, which has been wide-ranging and has covered many issues. As I said in my opening speech, one of the opportunities that the peace process has created has been a move towards the normalisation of political life and issues in Northern Ireland, allowing us to debate issues of common concern which relate in many ways to Members of Parliament from Scotland, Wales and England, too.

Many of the themes which have arisen in the debate have been familiar to Members from other areas of the country. As we have repeated several times, including in the debate earlier today, we support the Government's efforts in the peace process, but on the economic and social issues we are as divided from them in Northern Ireland as elsewhere.

The debate, which unfortunately has been short, has highlighted several such issues. Indeed, when I was listening to the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) talking about objectionable neighbours, drug addicts, giro drops and travellers, I thought that he could have been any Member of Parliament from the midlands conurbation, all of whom are facing similar problems to an equal or even a greater degree.

All of us, especially in urban areas, face such problems, which are common throughout western society. We need to try to achieve practical and realistic solutions to them all and to ensure that, especially in cases such as those that the hon. Gentleman described, the broad majority of the population are protected from an offensive and objectionable minority.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South would be well served if he considered the action taken by several midlands councils on precisely the sort of common nuisances that he described—action which has often been tough and effective. He may have read reports in the papers recently about Coventry council taking to court some individuals who were causing havoc on council estates and getting them barred from those estates.

The hon. Gentleman may also have read that, when individuals who have been using their premises for drug dealing are convicted, that is treated as a breach of their tenancy agreement and eviction proceedings are taken against them. That is greatly welcomed by the vast majority of residents on an estate, and especially by parents who are concerned that their children may be dragged into a life of drug use, which we know leads quickly to a life of crime. Lessons learned in other areas could well be applied throughout the country to reduce such problems and keep them in hand before they move way out of control.

The hon. Gentleman also expressed surprise that people over 75 are being referred to geriatric hospitals rather than ordinary hospitals. That causes concern and fear in my constituency, too. I have had correspondence from pensioners who are approaching the age of 75 but who are in full possession of their mental and physical faculties and who are terrified at the prospect that, if they have an accident or fall prey to an illness, they may be shunted off to a geriatric hospital and, as they would see it, written off, as people who have finished their useful life. That fills them with fear and trepidation, and the hon. Gentleman was right to raise the matter. Health boards and health authorities should be alert to the problem and should take account of the fears and wishes of the people concerned.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about water privatisation, and I hope that the Minister took note of the general opposition to that idea. Indeed, opposition to it is all that we hear, not only from politicians representing constituencies in Northern Ireland but from the community in Northern Ireland and, as I said earlier, from the people who represent the work force in the water industry. The Government have said that they will not introduce water privatisation this side of a general election, but the people of Northern Ireland fear that creeping privatisation is taking place. They have seen the Capita report on attempts to hive off a series of functions

[Mr. Spellar]

of the water industry, and they are also concerned that the change in the charging regime for water will be a prelude to privatisation.

A common issue across the country—it is not just a matter related to Stansted airport—is the question of air traffic control. The Select Committee on Transport has stated that the privatisation of air traffic control would not be in the interests of air travellers, or in the interests of Britain's reputation as a safe and secure air traffic centre. The Minister ought to take note of those concerns within Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

I shall move to some of the issues raised by hon. Members. I am sorry to have concentrated on the remarks of the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe), but he raised a considerable number of relevant and widely applicable issues.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) raised the issues of Larne harbour and the road transport system. I said in my opening remarks that the need for quick and effective communications to attract industry into Northern Ireland is paramount. The road system is important because many companies use containers to move goods to ports and then into the European transport system. That is a vital part of their economic success. The hon. Member for Antrim, East rightly identified the problems facing his constituency in respect of the variability of European Community grants, and all Members will have faced such difficulties.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) drew attention to a problem that is forgotten by many of us who represent substantially urban constituencies. I have one small farm with about two fields in the whole of my constituency. The hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out that unemployment and poverty—even if they are widely spread in a rural area—still cause great feelings of hopelessness. We should not forget the poverty of people in rural and semi-rural areas.

The hon. Gentleman also identified problems with roads in his constituency. The effect of the peace dividend on those areas which have managed to avoid violence was a strong point very well made by the hon. Gentleman, and it should give us all pause for thought.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman talked about the problems in his constituency associated with the decommissioning of the fishing fleets, and that point was also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy). Fishing communities around the country are concerned about the loss of employment which is a result of the unsatisfactory deal arrived at with regard to the Irish box. That obviously has implications for employment and, frankly, additional funds will not solve the problem. At the very least, however, an increase in the money available to assist the process of decommissioning is not only desirable but extremely necessary.

A further aspect of European Community policy was raised by the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), who talked about the vagaries of the common agricultural policy and how it affects livestock producers who are faced with one regime when selling their produce and another regime when buying their raw materials. We need to ensure that the Government are representing the interests of farmers in all parts of the United Kingdom as effectively as some other European Governments represent their farmers. I am sure that he found much common ground in the Chamber with his comments on the common agricultural policy.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen mentioned co-operative ventures in farming—that is not surprising, given his strong links with the co-operative movement and his history—and the inadequate amounts of money available for that, especially as the agricultural community moves into difficult times.

We are also considering the significant importance of agriculture to the Northern Ireland economy, in terms not only of primary production but of manufacturing and production based on agriculture. That is extremely important throughout the community, especially when we take in the argument of the hon. Member for South Down about the need to maintain employment and activity in rural areas. I am sure that the Minister took on board those arguments in relation to the need for assistance to the co-operative sector of agriculture.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) referred to the problem of children under five who cannot get mobility allowance. That is a nationwide problem, which has been raised by a number of Members of Parliament, and we have found the responses to be fairly unsatisfactory, especially when one takes into account the difficulties facing parents if their children are not only unable to walk but genuinely immobile and also becoming larger and heavier—for example, when trying to get them from the clinic to the car. The authorities should be more flexible and understanding. I hope that the Minister has taken those arguments on board.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South rightly stressed the fact that, while applications for grants have to be properly checked and assessed, unnecessary delay can cause considerable hardship. I am sure that we have all had people in our surgeries and advice bureaux who have got themselves into fearful difficulties as a result of gaps in income. While expenditure continues, they get into debt and incur the charges of those who are trying to recover the debt, whether it be the local council, the electricity board or some other organisation. They get into a spiral of debt and difficulty. I hope that the Minister recognises that problem and will convey to the proper authorities the need to ensure proper speed when processing claims.

I shall conclude shortly so as to allow the Minister time to answer the many questions raised in the debate, which is a welcome return to discussing the main, normal issues which face people day in and day out—the ordinary problems of getting by in life, earning a living, bringing up children and ensuring that they have a decent life with some hope for the future. The peace process has given some hope for the future. We need to ensure that people are able to fulfil those hopes and aspirations in their economic and social life. This debate will be part of a long series as we press the Government to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have the future and the prosperity that they deserve.

9.37 pm

Sir John Wheeler: This has been a detailed debate on the "Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 1994-95". It reminds me somewhat of autumn, in as much as I am obliged to deliver at the outset a rather tedious speech, in which I announce the spending estimates and

priorities for the coming period. That enables many hon. Members to raise very detailed matters, and I am placed in the position of responding to the autumn leaves falling—they are so many, varied and numerous—but, during the time allowed to me, I shall endeavour to reply to as many of them as I am able.

All the points made by hon. Members from Northern Ireland who contributed to the debate will be carefully considered by Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office and, where possible or appropriate, if I cannot refer to any of the issues that they raised this evening, they will receive a reply. Five hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies have been able to speak during the course of this debate: the hon. Members for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs); for South Down (Mr. McGrady); for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea); for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe); and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). I am particularly anxious to put their constituencies on record because they are all, in various ways, doughty champions of their constituents' interests. They have endeavoured to speak for others who could not participate in tonight's debate in so many of the important issues that concern the people of Northern Ireland.

In his opening remarks, the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) mentioned expenditure in Northern Ireland. May I tell him about the positive developments that have taken place and the substantial resources that are available? During 1994-95, the Government will make available no less than £7.5 billion to maintain the services at a high level and promote a range of developments and activities.

Those include—some of these points were touched on by hon. Members—expenditure on education services this year, which will be £1,301 million, an increase of 4 per cent. over 1993-94; and expenditure on health and personal social services, which will be £1,433 million, an increase of 7.3 per cent. over 1993-94. Over the past 15 years, spending on education rose by 35 per cent. in real terms and on health and personal social services by 52 per cent. Those impressive achievements illustrate the impact of the Government's policies on matters that are important to everyone in Northern Ireland.

In his opening remarks, the hon. Member for Warley, West, suggested that, were he in government, there would be substantial additional expenditure over and above that which I have just described to the House. What he did not say, however, is whether that additional expenditure would be found from increased taxation on the citizens of the United Kingdom as a whole, or whether other Government services and activities would be reduced. He owes an explanation to the public in due course about that.

The hon. Member for Warley, West said in his closing remarks that the Government had failed in their negotiations over the fishing issue. I strongly refute that. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food fought vigorously for British interests and produced the best deal for the UK fishermen. Had he not succeeded, fishermen would have been worse off and would not have had the arrangements in respect of the Irish box.

Rev. Martin Smyth: During the debate it was suggested that more funds should have been made available for decommissioning. Was not that the position taken by the Government of the Republic of Ireland, giving fishermen in the Republic more money for decommissioning, which is why they were reasonably satisfied?

Sir John Wheeler: Yes, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Northern Ireland fishermen have benefited from the decommissioning schemes, with the removal of 43 vessels under the 1993 and 1994 schemes. The additional £28 million earmarked for decommissioning over the next three years highlights the Government's commitment to giving assistance to rationalise the capacity of the UK fleet towards a level which fish stocks can sustain. I hope that the hon. Gentleman found that helpful.

Mr. McGrady: A matter requiring clarification has just arisen regarding the deal that was done at the Essen conference. As the Minister has now said, 43 boats are bound to be decommissioned, but 40 boats from the Spanish fleet will be permitted to enter the Irish box. Can the Minister explain whether that refers to 40 specific vessels or 40 vessels at any one time—in other words, the entire Spanish fleet by rotation?

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman will understand that that goes somewhat outwith the Northern Ireland supplementary spring estimates and outside my jurisdiction as a Minister for Northern Ireland, but I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food considers the hon. Gentleman's question and gives him as much help as he can by way of explanation.

I wish to respond to the brief intervention by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who is in his place, about Belfast international airport. The hon. Gentleman asked about the possible clawback of EC funds for Belfast international airport. On 16 August 1994, the Commission requested information about the terms and conditions relating to the sale of Belfast international airport and details of all the European regional development fund aid paid to the airport. That was to enable the Commission to consider whether clawback of ERDF aid would be appropriate. That information was sent to the Commission by the Government on 26 September 1994, but to date nothing has been heard from the Commission. I hope that the hon. Gentleman found that helpful.

The hon. Member for Warley, West was very selective in his references to surveys of the Northern Ireland economy. Almost without exception, those have been reported as showing growing confidence and success, and were a theme of the debate this afternoon. The Northern Ireland economy has grown faster than the national economy. Seasonally adjusted unemployment has decreased in 10 of the past 12 months. Put another way, in the year to September 1994, the number of employees in employment in Northern Ireland increased by 6,300, to reach 553,720. That represents an all-time high for employees in employment in Northern Ireland as a whole.

Mr. Spellar: Will the Minister tell us the breakdown in that increase between full-time and part-time jobs?

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman may know the answer, but I would say that jobs in Northern Ireland are welcome, whether they are called full-time or part-time, and the Government are in the business of encouraging the economy of Northern Ireland to find more jobs. I shall now press on. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for

[Sir John Wheeler]

Warley, West may care to ignore the facts, but the fact is that the Government's policies are strengthening the Northern Ireland economy and targeting social need, and are making significant improvements for all sections of the Northern Ireland community.

The hon. Member for Warley, West mentioned several other matters. I can confirm that the routine metering of purely domestic water supplies is not under consideration. Expenditure on roads maintenance, which has been referred to by several hon. Members from Northern Ireland, will be £41 million in 1995-96—evidence of the priority that the Government give the roads programme.

I know, as a result of travelling throughout Northern Ireland and meeting councils and others, that everyone wants his specific road priority scheme to be dealt with this year, if not sooner. I understand the enthusiasm of the councils, the hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies and others to see the road system improved as often as possible.

The hon. Member for Warley, West also referred to assistance for the long-term unemployed. The Government recognise fully the problems faced by the long-term unemployed, who are unlikely to gain employment unless their skills are updated and their motivation is improved. The Government have a radical new approach, which aims to put a large percentage of the long-term unemployed back to work.

We propose to introduce a pilot scheme which we shall call the community work programme. It aims to provide the long-term unemployed with opportunities to obtain useful work to allow them to rebuild their skills and regain their confidence. The pilot scheme will provide for at least 1,000 places in 1995-96 and, if it is successful, it will eventually provide up to 2,000 places. I am sure that hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies will be particularly glad to hear that.

Mr. Beggs: I assure the Minister that we all welcome the prospect of the creation of additional jobs. However, will he assure the House that areas beyond Belfast and Londonderry will benefit from those jobs?

Sir John Wheeler: A theme of tonight's debate has been the determination and enthusiasm of the five hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies in championing the causes of their constituents. I understand, and sympathise with, their aims. Of course, serious pockets of unemployment—often long-term unemployment—can be found all over Northern Ireland. They occur for different reasons. The Government's new scheme is intended to benefit, and to provide hope and opportunities to, people throughout Northern Ireland. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, when the scheme is applied, the responsible Minister will ensure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns and interests are taken into account.

One way of helping the unemployed is by sustaining and encouraging small businesses. The Government's programme of support for the small business community is provided mainly through the Local Enterprise Development Unit—LEDU—which operates either directly or through an extensive network of some 40 local enterprise agencies. That organisation has an annual budget of more than £30 million. It seeks to assist small manufacturing businesses through a wide range of schemes and initiatives which aim to improve competitiveness and to stimulate increased sales, particularly export sales. LEDU, in liaison with the local enterprise agency network, provides support to individuals who wish to become self-employed and start up new businesses.

The hon. Member for Warley, West and others also referred to housing expenditure. The Government's public expenditure contribution to housing is some £224 million in 1994-95. When supplemented by rental income and capital receipts, gross resources for housing should amount to £564 million. Those substantial resources will enable the Housing Executive to spend £33 million on building new houses.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the difficulties experienced by some of those in the contracting industry. They will welcome that additional expenditure because it means an opportunity for jobs for their employees. In addition, £96 million will be spent on repairs and maintenance, which will offer further work opportunities to building contractors. Some £73 million will be spent the rehabilitation and improvement of the existing housing stock. Expenditure on grants to private house owners is likely to be some £33 million and gross expenditure by the housing associations will amount to £45 million. All that expenditure is designed not only to improve the housing stock, but to feed back into the opportunities for employment.

Contrary to the claim by the hon. Member for Warley, West, the Government have a clear energy policy, which was set out in the Department of the Environment document, "Energy for the nineties and beyond". It includes energy efficiency, the clean provision and use of energies, lower cost and the provision of consumer interests, diversion of energy supply and security of supply.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East raised a large number of points and I shall endeavour to deal with as many as I can. I fully appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern about the relocation of the Stena Sealink from Larne harbour to Belfast. It is, of course, solely a matter for the commercial judgment of Stena Sealink what services it operates and on what routes. The Government are not in any way involved in that process. No European Union assistance will be available for any move of Stena Sealink's conventional ferries from Larne to Belfast. I understand that Stena Sealink will announce next month that it is relocating its Stranraer service from Larne to Belfast.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to roads serving Larne port, particularly the Belfast to Larne road, in which I know that he has a great deal of interest. About one third of the Belfast to Larne road is of motorway or dual-carriageway standard. As he says, the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland plans to bring forward a scheme to dual the remaining single-carriageway section. The first stage is scheduled to start in 1997-98. The remaining stages will be taken forward as funding permits and I know his desire to see that process speeded up will be well understood by my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for these matters.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to capital spending on schools. Capital provision for education and library boards in 1994-95 is some £47 million, of which almost

£15 million will be spent on major building works and some £17 million on minor capital works, school buses, site purchases and equipment. The remainder of the budget is for earmarked provision and includes £11 million for capital projects associated with education reform. I note the hon. Gentleman's point about the capital moratorium, and will draw it to the attention of my hon. Friend who is responsible for these matters so that he may give it further consideration.

Reference was also made to nursery education. I recognise, and am an enthusiast for, the value of nursery education in the development of pre-school age children, particularly in areas of social need, so I noted the hon. Gentleman's point with much interest and support.

The policy statement on early years provision for Northern Ireland, which was published jointly by the Departments of Education, of Health and of Social Services in September 1994, affirms the Government's long-term commitment to providing one full year's nursery education for all children, while focusing initially on areas of greatest need. It also provides a framework within which future services for young children will be developed.

The statement raises a number of issues which the Department wishes to take forward. Initial discussions with education and library boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools have already taken place, and it is intended to have further discussions shortly and I shall respond to the hon. Member's other points on education by way of correspondence.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned electricity prices. I note his concern, but as I believe he knows, it is more expensive to produce and distribute electricity in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain because power stations are smaller, the reserve margin is higher and customers, on average, are more dispersed. He also referred to the possible extension of the transitional relief fund scheme. That scheme was introduced to give industry time to adjust to the application of cost-reflected pricing following privatisation. It will have served that purpose by the time it ends, on 31 March 1996.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion, pursuant to Order [3 March].*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 14th February, be approved.

PETITION

Quarry Application (Heywood)

10 pm

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I wish to present a petition from the residents of Heywood, in my constituency. It has 3,863 signatures.

The Petition of Residents of Heywood

Declares that the plans for land at Gort Sandpit and Wilderness Quarry are premature to the UDP Inquiry to be held by the inspector in May 1995. They are contrary to the current Heywood Local Plan and the residents are concerned that all the strategic issues were not fully considered by the Local Planning Authority when they reached this decision.

Therefore the Petitioners request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State to call in the planning application for consideration at a Planning Inquiry.

And the Petitioners remain

Colin Thompson, 41 Vicarage Road, North Rochdale.

To lie upon the Table.

Television (Invasion of Privacy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10.1 pm

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): My reason for raising the invasion of privacy by television programmes stems directly from the experience of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Desmond Squire. I am authorised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) to say that it also stems from the experience of his constituents, Mr. and Mrs. David McAllister, and that of their son Duncan. My right hon. Friend is present; let me take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude for all he has done in pursuing the interests of both families, despite ministerial constraints. I believe that his presence tonight speaks for itself, as does the work that he has done in his constituency capacity.

I am also grateful for the interest of other hon. Members. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), who is also present, will know that in many senses the matter to which I refer results from the tragedy affecting the Province of Northern Ireland.

The complaints and remedies that I wish to advance in the short time available to me stem from the commissioning, production and screening of a film entitled "Beyond Reason" by Carlton (UK) Television Ltd. and Kensington Films and Television in prime time on 20 February 1995. The film related to the killing of my constituents' daughter—Penny McAllister, a young army officer's wife—by a woman soldier in Northern Ireland in 1991.

Let me say immediately that my concern—while inevitably concentrating on what I see as the invasion of the privacy of my constituents and those of my right hon. Friend—is not confined to that one film or to commercial television; similar concerns currently apply to the BBC. I shall point to other examples of objectionable television "faction", as it is described, and to documentaries in relation to which the relevant regulatory authorities have accepted complaints about invasion of privacy.

In assessing the extent of suffering that is caused to innocent victims of crime, particularly to families, I have been greatly assisted by a number of individual representations and, in particular, by the widespread evidence that was given to me by Victim Support. Its work shows many instances in which it has felt it right to question whether the retelling of sensational cases is in the public interest. Clearly, it feels that it is not. It sees cases where such retelling is deeply hurtful to the families and to friends of the parties involved, and where it delays the recovery from the ordeal from which many of them have already suffered.

At this stage, let me put the film "Beyond Reason" in the context of the 1994 report of the chairman of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. He said:

> "We continue to be concerned by crime reconstructions particularly when they are based on cases which have occurred in the recent past. We feel it is very important that in the making of such programmes consideration is given to the position of the relatives of the victim."

It is precisely that area—the position of the immediate families—that I wish to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister tonight. The detailed complaint that I have submitted on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Squire, and that which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Export Trade has submitted on behalf of Mr. Duncan McAllister, have gone directly to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, and we look to it to adjudicate.

I shall therefore endeavour tonight to avoid the detail of that particular complaint, and, indeed, much of the emotion that one feels about it, because I want to discuss some broad principles arising from such cases—conscious that my hon. Friend cannot be held responsible for the actions of the programme makers, but conscious, too, of the concern that he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage have expressed publicly on these issues. Above all, I want to take this opportunity to draw attention to the way in which the dice are loaded against families in such situations.

Let me first describe the situation that could apply to any family who becomes aware of a projected television programme, whether drama documentary or straight documentary, covering a crime reconstruction that involves a member of their family. If they object, what can they do?

There are, I believe, four relevant organisations with a regulatory role. First, there is the Independent Television Commission, which, under the Broadcasting Act 1990, operates general provisions which include the following terms:

> "that nothing is included in its programmes which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite crime or lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feeling."

Secondly, in the case with which I am concerned in commercial television, there is the influence that is exercised by the ITV network, which effectively books programmes for prime time viewing. It is required by the Act to regulate in advance the content of programmes. It has confirmed to me, however, in the most straightforward way, that in practice that means reviewing a script, which is usually put to it some 18 months before transmission, and it has little or no say in what emerges in the final version.

Thirdly, as regards complaints, there is the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, which can look at representations made either directly by those affected or by those acting with their authority in cases of unjust or unfair treatment and unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Finally, there is the Broadcasting Standards Council, which can look into complaints about excessive sex or violence and general matters of taste.

But the problem with all those organisations, so far as my constituents and others in their situation are concerned, is that they are all—they admit freely—powerless to exercise any real influence until the programme has been shown and, in many cases, the damage done. That was the position faced by the Squire and McAllister families, as well as my right hon. Friend the Minister and myself in acting on their behalf.

In seeking to prevent the broadcasting of a programme such as I have described, there seem to be only two remedies, one of which is to seek an injunction to prevent the programme from going ahead. My advice is that that would require a case to be made showing either libel or defamation. Quite apart from the cost implication and the fact that legal aid is not available in bringing actions of that kind, common sense says that it would be well nigh impossible to prove such a case without access to the script or to a preview of the film, both of which were denied to my constituents and the McAllisters.

There remains only the option of appealing to the film makers. The families affected by the making of "Beyond Reason" did so on many occasions. Their letters and the accounts of their meetings with the television executives concerned in the period from April 1994 to the eve of screening two and a half weeks ago, make heart-rending reading. They begged the film makers to cancel the project, and were fully supported by my right hon. Friend and by me.

What was the effect of all those representations? Obviously, the programme went ahead, and perhaps the best way for me to stand back from my feelings on the subject is to relate what some of those who were directly concerned in a professional capacity had to say. I turn to what can only be summarised as a barrage of criticism such as I have never seen before from those in the press who would be naturally inclined to support the argument for freedom of expression.

The Guardian said that this was

"the latest dubious recreation of a real recent crime. There was no good reason to use real names or for us to repeat them."

The Independent commented in an introductory disclaimer, adding:

"This is what passes for ethics in real life drama."

The Times stated:

"The real question is should this film have been made at all? I would say no, if only because of the objections of Penny McAllister's parents."

The Daily Telegraph said:

"We were in the ethically highly questionable world of 'faction'".

The writer in *The Daily Express* said:

"Beyond Reason was heralded by its publicity as impressive, compelling and a real-life story of a tragic affair leading to a fatal attraction murder".

She added:

"Well how about these for a few meaty adjectives to beef up the credits: disgusting, cynical, repellent, obscene, nauseating, cruel, heartless and twisted. Oh I watched it all right with mounting anger at the pain it would have caused Penny McAllister's parents."

Innocent victims of crimes, such as my constituents, were put through the whole process of aggravated suffering, with massive pre-television and press publicity, with the bringing back to life of their dead daughter, as well as the portrayal of themselves by look-alike actors. This offence is compounded by the re-creation of hairstyles, clothes and all the details that were required, whatever disclaimers are made, to give a calculated impression of total reality.

Again one asks, what can they and others in such situations do, and what remedies are open to them? As I have said, complaints have been submitted by my right hon. Friend and by me to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, the Independent Television Commission, the Independent Television network and the Broadcasting Standards Council. They have all been made aware of the terms of those complaints, but they are all severely hampered in any action that they can take.

I am not prejudging what may happen, but I am aware that the serious thought which went into the latest revision of the ITC programme code as recently as last month shows the concern within that organisation. Plainly, the revised code still allows the programme makers to proceed without taking a blind bit of notice of the families concerned.

On the positive side, I am aware from correspondence with the ITV network that its commissioning policy is moving away from crime reconstruction, and I understand that, in some instances, that has been supported by those who are responsible for making programmes applying a self-denying ordinance. There is also evidence of real concern by TV industry leaders such as Mr. Michael Grade, and we should open up this debate.

The Broadcasting Complaints Commission provides the immediate opportunity for complaints in this case. It has upheld a number of relevant complaints, including, for example, that made against Granada Television for the dramatic reconstruction of a murder case in Scotland which was broadcast in 1993. Significantly, when "Beyond Reason" was shown on 20 February, it was preceded by an announcement on the screen giving the terms of a commission finding on another programme, when it upheld a complaint of invasion of privacy against "World in Action" from the parents of a murdered child.

That points directly to the fundamental weakness and lack of sanctions that are open to regulatory authorities such as the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. All that happens after such criticisms have been upheld is that there is a requirement for the commission's announcement to be published in the "TV Times", and to be shown briefly on the television screen.

As a sanction, that can be seen only as the merest slap on the wrist. There is no obligation on the broadcaster to indicate whether the criticism has been accepted, or whether it will lead to a change in policy. Above all, there is no requirement to apologise to the aggrieved party.

Under those circumstances, what can Her Majesty's Government and the House do to right what is clearly the manifest weakness and injustice in our systems? First, my understanding is that the Broadcasting Act 1990 must be reviewed in 1997-98. Removal of the old independent broadcasting authorities' right to view programmes before transmission, and the reliance on self-regulation no longer seems appropriate.

I urge the Government, therefore, to consider providing the Independent Television Commission with the power—where it has good reason to suspect that an intended programme may be in breach of either the spirit or letter of the code—to call for a screening of that programme before transmission and, if necessary, to order its withdrawal. A similar power should be extended to the ITV network.

Taken together, those proposals would provide the possible sanction and deterrent against sensationalism and the "ratings at all costs" approach, which underlies some of the problems that I have described. They would go a long way to ensuring that programmes were truly receptive to the views of families.

Secondly, I understand that Her Majesty's Government are considering the possible merger of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission with the Broadcasting Standards Council. I urge that that should take place in the near future. It is clear that problems exist for people who make complaints, because they are put from one organisation to the other. There is necessarily a close interrelationship between unfair and unjust treatment, invasions of privacy, and judgments of taste in relation to such matters as sex and violence.

[Sir Michael Marshall]

Thirdly, the situation that I have outlined is an additional reason for giving urgent consideration to introducing legislation that would cover the statutory right to privacy. In that sense. I support the thrust of the 1990 Calcutt report and of the most recent of his reports, which puts forward the idea of a new tort of invasion of privacy.

I have noted that that last proposal has attracted the support of the Select Committee on National Heritage in its fourth report on privacy and media intrusion, to which the Government are due to respond. That Committee's concern, and that of Calcutt, were primarily with regard to the press, but those same principles should apply in considering ways in which the people affected by television could be covered.

I cannot end without adding that I have tried, as far as possible, to stick to arguments of principle, despite deep feelings on this matter. Much might be said about a position that has clearly appalled even insiders in the industry. Having seen the ways in which programme makers can ride roughshod over the wishes of the families concerned—so that, as one family member has said,

"they are playing God with our lives"—

I am clear where the public interest lies in these matters. It must surely be in providing real checks and balances, and real deterrents and ways in which the sufferings of constituents, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North and myself may be avoided for others.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall) on the persistence that has resulted in his getting a debate on this deeply serious and tragic subject. I have listened carefully to his concerns about the difficult and important subject of media intrusion into private lives.

As so many individual cases have shown, the line between a legitimate public interest in the issues involved, and the rights of individuals to privacy and fair treatment, is not a clear and definite one. That must be more so when the issues are presented as scripted drama, with the tensions of that genre highlighting individual circumstances, involving particular and identifiable people.

It is not for the Government to comment on the artistic merits of the drama "Beyond Reason". My hon. Friend will understand the long established convention that Government do not normally become involved in individual production or programming decisions. What the Government have done is to establish the independent Broadcasting Complaints Commission precisely to deal with the sort of problems raised tonight about this play.

The adjudicatory approach of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission allows persons affected by a broadcast, where they feel that they have suffered unfair treatment or an invasion of privacy, to make a complaint and receive a full hearing, legally represented if they choose. If their complaint is upheld, a summary will be published in the appropriate television programme guide, as my hon. Friend said, and the findings broadcast in a prominent position in an evening schedule.

My hon. Friend described this as a mere slap on the wrist, and I can well understand why he so described it, but the Government's intention was that the thorough adjudication process should leave both sides with a better understanding for the future of where the boundaries lie.

Broadcasters have, I believe, generally shown respect for issues of privacy. Of the 13 complaints made to the commission between April 1993 and March 1994, only one was fully upheld, and four were upheld in part. In the current year, the commission has dealt with 23 complaints of unwarranted invasion of privacy, of which three were upheld and one upheld in part.

The general programme code published by the Independent Television Commission, the BBC's producer guidelines and the Broadcasting Standards Council's code of practice all provide a sound framework within which the broadcasters consider to what extent they are entitled to use material that identifies individuals, or incidents from the recent past.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government intend at the earliest opportunity to merge the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. The Government, too, recognise the close relationship between their functions and believe that members of the public will appreciate the clarity that the merger will bring.

My hon. Friend suggested that it may be preferable to allow the regulatory bodies to preview controversial programmes. It is a very interesting idea, and I shall look at it closely. He may wish to have a meeting with me on the subject, so that we can pursue these matters at greater length than is possible during an Adjournment debate.

The Government usually take the view that, in a mature society, censorship or prior restraint is undesirable and contrary to the right of free expression enshrined in the European convention on human rights. The approach adopted in this country—that of self-regulation by the broadcasters against a framework of guidelines and codes of practice—has always been considered the best way to balance the right to freedom of expression with considerations of taste, decency, privacy and fair representation. Viewers then have every opportunity to express their opinions on particular programmes, and can be seen to be influencing programming decisions themselves.

If a commercial broadcaster persists in flouting the ITC's code—section 3.7 deals specifically with drama documentaries—the commission may impose financial sanctions, and ultimately withdraw the broadcaster's licence. The BBC is responsible, under the royal charter, for responding to similar complaints.

The Government are absolutely not complacent where issues of privacy are involved. As with the portrayal of sex and violence on television, we are currently looking closely into the matter of privacy. It is under review at the moment, as we recognise it to be an area of great concern across all forms of media production, written and audio-visual. We shall, before long, be publishing a White Paper on privacy and media intrusion, and it is, of course, possible in the light of this that the regulatory bodies may be prompted to clarify further, strengthen or otherwise change existing guidelines and codes of practice.

I noted my hon. Friend's observation that it is time for the enactment of a statutory right of privacy. In the light of the forthcoming White Paper, I cannot comment on that this evening, beyond what I have already said, but I have noted my hon. Friend's views. As I said, I should be extremely

keen to discuss the matter further with him and, indeed, with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Export Trade if he so wishes, given his close interest in the matter.

My hon. Friend has spoken eloquently on behalf of his constituents, whose daughter was depicted in the drama "Beyond Reason". I am told—indeed, my hon. Friend mentioned this in his speech—that the makers of the play, which I have not yet seen, in their introductory script, were acutely conscious of the topicality of the play's subject matter, of the need to take into account whether publication was in the public interest, and of the need for care and sensitivity in the treatment of the reconstruction of the crime. However, having heard my hon. Friend's comments, I have asked my officials to get me a video of the film so that I can see it before I have the meeting, which I hope I shall have, with my hon. Friend.

I know that my hon. Friend has made a complaint on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Squire to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, and that the commission has entertained his complaint. I can do no more tonight than to take note of his concerns, and to await that adjudication.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 9 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 16 March.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL (*By Order*)
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 16 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Corporal Punishment

1. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to introduce legislation to enable courts to issue sentences of corporal punishment for certain crimes of violence.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Unfortunately, I have no plans to reintroduce corporal punishment into the sentencing powers of the criminal court.

Mr. Winterton: I am sorry to receive that reply. Does my hon. Friend accept that, despite the Government's herculean efforts to reduce crime in recent years, crime and the fear of crime continue to blight our lives? Does he not think that those young people who commit offences of violence against the individual should be in receipt of a dose of their own medicine and that the maxim "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is more appropriate and relevant today than ever before?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, which will strike a chord with many people in this nation. He is also right to talk about the fear of crime. Nevertheless, we must not forget that the last year for which figures are available saw a remarkable drop in levels of crime—down 5.5 per cent.—following a 1 per cent. drop the year before. I certainly accept my hon. Friend's point of view that a punishment of that kind would satisfy the desire of many people, but the deterrent value might be slightly more questionable. We have a wide range of penalties which, if they are used by the courts in all the appropriate circumstances, should be more than adequate for some of the young hooligans that we have to contend with today.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the Minister aware that, if he reconsidered his decision on that measure, it would have a significant effect in Northern Ireland in so far as it would bring the Government into line with the IRA Sinn Fein, to whose wishes, ethos and practices they have tried so hard to concede in the past few weeks?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman lays a tempting trap, but it is not one into which I wish to step at present.

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act

2. **Mr. James Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 against crime; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): The Act received Royal Assent only last November, and it is too soon to say what effect it has had, but I am confident that, as the Police Federation has said, it will

"enhance the stature and ability of the criminal justice system to reduce crime, bring criminals to justice and significantly reduce the fear of crime, thereby improving the quality of life for many members of society".

Mr. Hill: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that in some cases the law seems to protect the yobbos? I refer to the case in which a person who harassed a family, threatening to throw a baby out of a railway carriage, but was not punished; the policeman who hit the person doing the harassing was fined £150 while the young yobbo got away scot free. For the sake of the British public, we have to tighten up on that sort of harassment of innocent people by yobbos.

Mr. Howard: While I entirely understand the indignation that my hon. Friend expresses, which I am sure will be felt by many people, he will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual cases, especially as I remain the final appellate authority for police disciplinary matters. My hon. Friend will also understand that the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts are independent and that I have no responsibility for them.

Mr. Bermingham: As certain provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 are not yet in place, in so far as they are not yet operative, will the Home Secretary reconsider the caution and the right to silence in the light of recent rulings by the European Court to the effect that there is a right to silence?

Mr. Howard: About two thirds of the Act are in force and I have no plans to look again at the caution or the changes that we have made to the so-called right of silence. I am confident that they do not conflict with any of our international obligations.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is important that the courts use positively and purposefully the stronger powers given to them, especially in dealing with young people, and

that the public are sick and tired of seeing young offenders—and young thugs, in particular—apparently walking away scot free from our legal system?

Mr. Howard: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

3. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take regarding the future organisation and level of criminal injuries compensation.

Mr. Howard: It would be premature to take any action in advance of the judgment of the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords. In the meantime, we are continuing to take note of any comments or representations made to us about the criminal injuries compensation scheme.

Mr. Ainger: In the light of that, is the Home Secretary aware of the case of Miss Merlyn Nuttall who, three years ago, was raped, strangled with a cheese wire, stabbed to the bone in her neck with a broken bottle and left for dead in a burning room? Last week, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board awarded her £76,101 compensation. How can the Home Secretary justify the fact that, under his tariff scheme, victims assaulted in that way today would receive only £7,500? Is it not a fact that the Home Secretary is only claiming to be hard on criminals, whereas in fact he is being hard on victims?

Mr. Howard: I am aware of the facts of that case but, as I have said many times before, unless and until the Opposition are prepared to give a commitment that, were they ever to come back into government, they would restore the old scheme in its entirety, it is pointless for the hon. Gentleman and his friends to make arguments of that type. The truth is that at least 60 per cent. of victims will receive at least as much or more under the tariff scheme, which will remain the most generous scheme of compensation for criminal injuries in the world.

Mr. David Atkinson: Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House whether those responsible for the criminal injuries are made to contribute towards the cost of the compensation to the victims, and if so, in what way, and if not, why not?

Mr. Howard: The courts certainly have the power to make orders of that type, and they frequently do so.

Mr. Michael: What kind of example is the Home Secretary setting for young yobs when he seeks to avoid responsibility for the consequences of his actions, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) in the example that he gave? Does the Home Secretary still not realise that his rhetoric about victims has no effect when people can see the indelible effect of his one genuine policy, which is to cut the total sum available to victims, and especially to cut the level of compensation available for the victims of the most horrific crimes?

Mr. Howard: Far from being cut, the sum will continue to increase. We have had enough synthetic indignation from the hon. Gentleman and his friends. If they care as much about that topic as they say they do, they would make the commitment that they have consistently failed to make. In the absence of such a commitment, what they say on the subject is so much hot air.

Mr. Fabricant: We would all like the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to increase its funds—as, indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend has said that it has—but is not our scheme already seven times more generous than that in France and 20 times more generous than that in Germany?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. It is also more generous than the whole of the rest of the European Community and more generous than in the United States.

Police Establishment, North Yorkshire

4. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the police establishment in North Yorkshire.

Mr. Maclean: Since 1979, the approved establishment of the North Yorkshire police has increased by 90 to 1,418. The budget for the North Yorkshire police will increase by 8 per cent. for next year, which will mean a real and substantial increase in resources for the force to spend as the chief constable thinks fit.

Mr. Bayley: According to the most recent figures, 24 fewer police officers are serving in North Yorkshire now than in 1979. How does that square with the Government's manifesto pledges to be tough on crime? Will the Minister give a guarantee to the people of North Yorkshire that when the new arrangements for funding the police are introduced in April, he will increase the number of police officers serving in the county at least to the authorised established figure of 1,418 which he mentioned?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman has obviously not been following what has been happening in the House for the past year. The Government will cease to set establishment figures. The chief constable can use his 8 per cent. increase in next year's budget to spend as he sees fit on officers, civilians, a mixture of both, or technology. The hon. Gentleman's figures are right, but they are only part of the story. Had he bothered to check with North Yorkshire police, he would have discovered that, while the overall number of officers in the force has declined, it has been at the expense of support and administration staff, and the force assures me that it has 38 more constables out on the streets on operational duties, which is surely to be welcomed.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware of the difficulty currently faced by North Yorkshire police in rural areas in policing demonstrations by animal rights activists outside farms? Does he agree that that is yet a further reason why we need to concentrate new and more resources on policing in rural areas which, representing a rural constituency as he does, my hon. Friend knows only too well is so important for farmers and people who live in our villages?

Mr. Maclean: It is important that the law is upheld throughout the whole country, and I am confident that the 43 police forces in England and Wales will continue

to uphold people's legitimate right to go about their lawful and legal business. That will be done in North Yorkshire, Sussex, Essex and throughout the country. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that rural areas require adequate policing. The budget increase of 8 per cent. for North Yorkshire police will enable the chief constable to deploy his resources appropriately and in the best possible way, giving maximum coverage to all parts of the county.

Sussex Police (Funding)

5. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future funding of the Sussex police.

Mr. Maclean: Sussex will have £145.78 million available for 1995-96, an increase of £14.2 million or 10.8 per cent. over 1994-95. In addition, it will not have to find £1.14 million, or 0.8 per cent., to pay for common police services. We have also allocated £7.62 million for building projects and the purchase of equipment. Those significant increases in resources will help Sussex police to continue their excellent performance.

Mr. Waterson: Is my hon. Friend aware how widely his generosity in the settlement for Sussex has been welcomed by my constituents in Eastbourne and how much they agree with the chairman of the new police authority, Dr. Walsh, who talks of

"a budget to be proud of",

particularly the recent announcement of an increase of more than 100 new bobbies on the beat in Sussex?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am glad that Sussex is using the increased funds available for that purpose. My hon. Friend has given us only half the story, however, as according to the latest survey in the *Police Review* magazine Sussex is to recruit not only 110 extra bobbies but 123 extra civilians. That seems to match the pattern around the country, where the survey reveals there could be 400 extra officers next year and 900 extra civilians. It is a safe bet that the vast majority of the extra civilians whom the police service intends to recruit will release yet more bobbies for operational duty, adding to the 7,000 extra officers released for operational work since 1983 through the civilianisation programme.

Warwickshire Police (Funding)

6. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about levels of funding for the Warwickshire police.

Mr. Maclean: Representations about the proposed level of funding for 1995-96 have been received from the acting chief constable and from the chairman of the police authority. My right hon. and learned Friend and I have also received letters on that subject from my hon. Friend and other hon. Members.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. Is he aware of the growing concern in Warwickshire about levels of police funding? It is alleged that, because of inadequate funds, police numbers will remain the same with no further increase. I am also advised that there will be no additional training and that there is a distinct possibility that promotion within the force will be restricted.

Added to that are the difficulties created by funding the policing of demonstrations currently taking place at Coventry airport in connection with live animal exports. All that adds up to a pretty grim picture for Warwickshire. What hope can my hon. Friend give me and other Warwickshire Members about funding for Warwickshire?

Mr. Maclean: The biggest item of police expenditure—police pay—is due to increase by 2.5 per cent. next year, but Warwickshire's overall budget will increase by 5.3 per cent. Of course, we will not take back the 0.8 per cent. for common police services. Warwickshire police should have more than 6 per cent. in new resources available to them next year. In those circumstances, I hope that they will not experience the difficulties to which my hon. Friend alluded. I believe that that will enable a good but very small force such as Warwickshire to continue its excellent record.

As to the policing of demonstrations, I know that some concern was expressed that costs were running at £27,000 per day, but I can assure my hon. Friend that that is not so; that was the one-off cost for the day of the funeral at Coventry cathedral. The daily cost to Warwickshire is about £5,000, and the Warwickshire force is sharing the policing operation with the West Midlands police and splitting the cost in that way.

Mr. Olner: Will the Minister respond to the honest representations that have been made? Over a number of years, the police force in Warwickshire has reduced senior ranks so that more money can be spent on the constabulary for policing the beat. I wish that the Minister would announce a settlement for Warwickshire that is as generous as the aforementioned settlement for Sussex.

Mr. Maclean: I have listened carefully to representations that I have received from all over the country and we introduced a formula in an attempt to get a fairer distribution of resources. To put the situation into perspective, since 1979 spending on the Warwickshire police has increased by 125 per cent. in real terms. The national average is 92 per cent. The strength of the Warwickshire police force has increased by 23 per cent. and the national average increase is 14 per cent.

I pay tribute to Warwickshire for having civilianised 122 posts since 1985, which has released more bobbies for the beat. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary suggests that a further 80 posts could be civilianised. Perhaps Warwickshire will spend some of the 6 per cent. extra resource allocation this year to continue its successful civilianisation programme.

Prison Regime

7. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make the prison regime more rigorous.

Mr. Howard: Prison regimes should be rigorous, demanding and constructive. This year the Prison Service will be introducing a new system to ensure that

privileges are earned by good behaviour and lost by bad behaviour. I have taken steps to strengthen the prison discipline system.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Will the Home Secretary put a stop to Sky Television and nine-hole golf courses in our prisons, together with the practice of inmates sending wardens out of prison to get steak and chips? Senior citizens in my constituency of Welwyn Hatfield are concerned when criminals want to get into prison and not out of it. They also want to know—*[Interruption.]*—if the lot opposite ever got into power, would the nation be subject to hard labour like it was in 1979, with a 98 per cent. tax rate and 27 per cent. inflation?

Mr. Howard: I have no doubts about answering the last part of my hon. Friend's question in the affirmative. I think that the other points that he raised were covered in my original answer.

Mr. George Howarth: Is it not time that the Home Secretary understood—as everyone else does—that tough words and no policy are no substitute for a proper approach to our prisons? After almost 16 years in power, does he not realise that the Government have failed to produce a drug-free and secure prison system which keeps offenders properly locked up? Is he aware that failure is being trailed by Lord Tumim, the chief inspector of prisons, and the boards of prison visitors? When will the Home Secretary do something to ensure that our prisons have proper work-based regimes and are drug-free? We need prison regimes which work and positively rehabilitate people, rather than the mess that he has got the prison service into at the moment.

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman were remotely interested in what is happening in our prisons, he would know that we have already started our mandatory drugs testing programme, that we are taking firm action to deal with the all too prevalent problem of drugs in prisons, that we are implementing the security recommendations in Sir John Woodcock's report and that we are dealing with these matters. Effective action is indeed being taken.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: In view of the successes in relation to recidivism, will my right hon. Friend consider introducing into Britain a pilot scheme along the lines of the American boot camps? Will he bear in mind that they provide training in discipline and respect for other people, which we have lost since the abolition of national service, training in the work ethic and respect for other people in society—particularly families—and that the advantages of those camps are beginning to percolate the American system and ought to be imitated here?

Mr. Howard: I know that my hon. and learned Friend and the Select Committee on Home Affairs visited a boot camp in the United States, as have I and a number of Prison Service officials. We are currently evaluating the study that has been undertaken of boot camps in the United States. I share my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for some of the facets of the boot camp system and I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Schengen Agreement

8. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Schengen agreement.

Mr. Howard: I understand that the Schengen agreement is due to come into the operation as between seven of the Schengen states on 26 March for an initial period of three months. The United Kingdom is not a party to the agreement and has no intention of applying for membership, which would be inconsistent with the maintenance of our system of frontier controls.

Mr. Trimble: Has the Home Secretary studied carefully the arrangements within the seven Schengen countries for close police co-operation, which is appropriate for them as they are creating a common travel area? As there is already a common travel area in the British Isles, does he not consider it appropriate to have the same levels and the same provisions for police co-operation operating in the British Isles as will be operating within the Schengen system?

Mr. Howard: There has been considerable improvement in recent years in the extent of co-operation between the police in the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic and I hope that will continue.

Mr. Jessel: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that our constituents will never accept that the control of immigration into Britain should depend on the uncertain reliability of policing of the coasts and borders of such countries as Italy, Greece and Austria, and that if the European Union ever dreams of trying to force such a policy on us it will begin—

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken with his question on this particular agreement. Is there another Conservative Member—

Mr. Jenkin *rose*—

Madam Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will get the right question. I am sure that he knows what the agreement means.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Schengen agreement represents the ambition of the hard core of the European Union to do away with internal frontiers? Can he allay the concerns arising from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State's visit to the Brussels Council today and confirm that a common visa does not bring any nearer a common system of immigration and the abolition of our frontiers?

Mr. Howard: I can certainly and without any equivocation give my hon. Friend that assurance. He will also be pleased to know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is placing a parliamentary scrutiny reserve on the common visa format regulation which is before the Council of Ministers today.

Mr. Straw: I welcome what the Secretary of State had to say about not implementing the Schengen agreement in Britain. Does he agree that it would be quite inappropriate for us as an island to adopt that

agreement and replace border controls with a potentially less effective but more repressive system of internal controls, street stops and compulsory identity cards?

Also, will the Home Secretary resist the imposition of any list of European Union common visas that, as currently proposed, would impose visa requirements on visitors from 29 mainly black Commonwealth countries, including Zambia, Zimbabwe, Trinidad and Barbados—but not one white Commonwealth country? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that such a policy would do nothing for equal rights or race relations in this country?

Mr. Howard: The visa list is still under discussion in the Council of Ministers. It is no use the hon. Gentleman making such points when he and his party committed themselves to a policy document that said that majority voting in the European Community should become the rule.

Mr. Salmond: Does not the Home Secretary feel foolish, at a time when all political parties in Northern Ireland are in favour of the common travel area through the island of Ireland, that members of the Government and Labour Front Benches are hostile to the sense of the Schengen agreement? When will members of both Front Benches stop pandering to the prejudices of their Back Benchers?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman will find, much to his electoral cost when the time comes, that the people of Scotland are as enthusiastic about the retention of external frontier controls as are the people of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Prisoners

9. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were in prison at the most recent count.

Mr. Howard: On Tuesday 7 March 1995 a total of 50,804 Prison Service prisoners were in custody in England and Wales.

Sir David Knox: Why is it necessary to lock up more people in prison in this country than in most other west European countries? Is not there a cheaper and more effective form of punishment for at least some of the people who end up in prison?

Mr. Howard: I advise my hon. Friend to view comparisons with other European Union countries with great caution. The latest figures available to me show that the number of prisoners per 100,000 population is higher in Spain, Portugal and Austria; the same as this country in Italy; and nearly the same in France.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Is the Home Secretary concerned about the large increase in the number of women sent to prison, which has increased 40 per cent. in the past two years? Many of them are fine defaulters. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider giving magistrates the same option as their counterparts in Scotland to issue supervised attendance orders to fine defaulters?

Mr. Howard: Courts have a wide range of sentences at their disposal, and they decide which sentence is appropriate in any particular case.

Whitemoor Prison

10. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to visit Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor to discuss prison policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I visited Whitemoor prison on 10 October 1994. I have no plans for a further visit.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that I visited Whitemoor prison, just outside my constituency, last Monday? As well as meeting the excellent new governor, Mr. Brody Clark, I met many prison officers. The majority of them, while believing that there should be a balance between toughness and rehabilitation, feel strongly that when it comes to prisoners wearing their own clothes, doing their own cooking and receiving as many as five visits a month, there should be more emphasis on punishment.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's interest. He will have heard the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), which dealt with many of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham).

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Will the Home Secretary confirm that in his tough, rigorous prison system it is possible for IRA terrorists to carry Semtex from one prison to another?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows full well of the dreadful events at Whitemoor prison, which the House considered on a previous occasion at some length.

Prisons (Drug Abuse)

11. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he intends to introduce to encourage greater vigilance among prison staff in respect to drug abuse in prisons; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): A new and comprehensive Prison Service drugs strategy will be announced shortly. It will contain a number of measures aimed at helping prison staff to be more vigilant in reducing the supply of drugs within prison. The new compulsory drug testing programme now being introduced will help further by identifying many more drug misusers than at present.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my hon. Friend aware of what I learnt recently during a visit to a prison in my constituency, which is what is known as the mogadon factor? It is the tacit approval of prisoners obtaining drugs because when they are stoned they are more docile and more easily placated. Does my hon. Friend agree that if there is such condonation of the use of drugs, it is the Government's duty and that of prison governors to ensure that it is stamped out?

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend that reducing the level of drug misuse of any sort is one of

the Prison Service's seven strategic priorities for 1994-97. The strategy that will be announced will embrace these very matters.

Mr. Tipping: Does the Minister recall that Judge Tumim, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, has recently reported on Styal women's prison, stating that almost all the prisoners there are using cannabis and that 80 per cent. of them are using opium? Does he recall also that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, wrote in November 1993 warning of the problem? Why has action not been taken to resolve the problem?

Mr. Baker: A great deal of action has been taken. Research and resources have been mobilised. Work has already started on the drug programme in 12 prison establishments. The strategy that will be outlined shortly will reveal that a comprehensive training programme to enable staff better to recognise drugs and the introduction of mandatory drug testing for prisoners will be included. The problems are being addressed, and they will be addressed even more in future.

Sir Terence Higgins: Will the proposals include provision for physical barriers to prevent drugs from being passed from visitors to prisoners in prisons where there is known drug abuse?

Mr. Baker: Yes. That is one of the matters that is being taken up in the strategy.

Broadcasting (Violent Material)

12. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research is being undertaken by his department into the levels of violence in society and the broadcasting of violent material.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office is funding a research project which will look at whether it is possible to identify images and concepts in videos which appeal to, and have a greater effect upon, young offenders, both at the time of viewing and subsequently.

Mr. Alton: I welcome the new research, which I understand will be undertaken over the next couple of years. Does the Minister accept, however, that common sense alone tells us that what we see is bound to have some effect upon us? Is he aware of the "Panorama" programme, which revealed recently that up to 10 per cent. of people who are predisposed to commit violent acts are likely to have them triggered by what they see?

Will the Minister take the opportunity to condemn the makers of violent television programmes, videos and films in which violence is glorified? Will he take the opportunity also to condemn those who set violence in an amoral context and who see the cultivation of violence as the ultimate fashion accessory of the 1990s?

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to agree with every word that the hon. Gentleman says. It is true that the research conducted to date is inconclusive, but common sense tells us—this is the Government's firm view—that video and television images must have an effect. If television does not influence behaviour, why should hard-nosed capitalists spend £3,000 million a year on advertising? Of course television is bound to influence behaviour. There is a heavy burden on everyone who makes films—not only videos but those who are in charge of news programmes as well—to ensure that if there are scenes of violence they are set in a relevant context, that they are not gratuitous and that they are not included merely for titillation.

Mr. Rowe: Is my hon. Friend confident that the research project will deliver valuable results? I understand that much of the large budget of the Home Office that has been spent over the years on research has resulted in little of that research being used in the making of policy. Is he able to give us an assurance that that is not the case?

Mr. Maclean: I can give my hon. Friend a categorical assurance that, whatever the results of the research, the Government will implement them. I might not agree with the conclusions. We have tried to focus on the research. We commissioned it to seek to establish whether it is possible to identify certain images of concepts in videos that might appeal to youngsters of a certain disposition. For example, and without going into detail, my hon. Friend may watch the film "Terminator II"; he may or he may not; certain parts of it may appeal to him. Research has shown that some parts of the film—it is interesting that there are some especially horrific scenes—are of particular interest to young offenders. If we can identify the trigger mechanisms, we might be better able to guide censors in future.

Mr. Straw: While research directed specifically at the effect of violence on young offenders is welcome, does the Minister not accept that it is likely that the gratuitous violence that is seen on television, videos and through other media is corrupting not only potential young offenders but all young people, since it is bound to reduce their tolerance to violence? Although research is essential, it is also essential that action is taken, particularly by people like the British Board of Film Classification, to ensure that the gratuitous violence that is now on our screens is cut out.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is why, in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, we introduced new statutory criteria for the BBFC to have special regard to when classifying works. We also brought computer chips and cartridges under the scope of the Act for the first time. We gave trading standards officers new powers to deal with videos and introduced a new custodial sentence for the supply of unclassified video material.

I hope, by this summer, to lay before the House orders that will narrow the category of video works that are exempt from the requirement of classification, and to bring in powers to review old works, if the BBFC thinks that appropriate, because that will also help to cut out some of the gratuitous violence. I return to the basic point: the first onus is on film producers to be sensible.

Illegal Immigration

13. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what methods he uses to assess the extent of illegal immigration into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no official estimates of the number of illegal immigrants in the United Kingdom. By its very nature, illegal immigration is difficult to measure and any estimates would be highly speculative.

Sir Michael Neubert: Did my hon. Friend see official figures this week that forecast that legal immigrants to

London from Europe and elsewhere will number more than 1 million over the next 20 years? Can he assure me and my constituents that controls are adequate to stop illegal immigrants adding to that number?

Mr. Baker: The figures to which my hon. Friend refers are projections and are not intended to be forecasts; they reflect inward migration assumptions that were published two years ago. Indeed, a large element in the figures is migration from other European Union nations. I can assure my hon. Friend that firm action is taken against those who are found to be here unlawfully. Some 7,200 illegal entrants were detected in 1994 and 4,750 overstayers, or persons working in breach of conditions, were issued with a notice of intention to deport. We take firm action against any illegal immigrants we find.

Mr. Madden: Can the Minister confirm that, unless elaborate, inconvenient and expensive arrangements are made to count into the United Kingdom every person who enters, and count out every person who leaves, estimates of illegal immigration can be nothing more than a wild guesstimate?

Mr. Baker: Estimates of illegal immigration that I have seen have been, as the hon. Gentleman said, wild guesstimates, and they do nothing to enable a proper atmosphere in which action can be taken and people in this country reassured. I must reassure the hon. Gentleman that we have a wide and busy programme of action to deal with illegal immigration, about which many people in this country are concerned.

Mr. Hawkins: While I welcome what my hon. Friend has said, does he agree that many people in my constituency and in constituencies across the country are concerned about illegal immigration and need to be reassured, and that the Labour party is hopelessly split on this issue, as on many others, because while the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has said that he is in favour of keeping frontier controls, the Labour leader in the European Parliament, Pauline Green, the leader of the whole European socialist group, has said that she is in favour of dismantling all frontier controls, here and right across Europe?

Mr. Baker: What my hon. Friend says is absolutely right. People need reassurance. Notwithstanding that, they receive no reassurance when they listen to the Labour party. The action that we take is part of a full programme. We act through operations and exercises against illegal immigration. We follow up cases on a targeted basis. We liaise with the police and we take action against facilitators, who are perhaps at the worst end of the illegal immigration business.

Market Testing

14. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to announce a pause in market testing for prison services.

Mr. Howard: The prison service is committed to the policy for increased private sector management of prisons which I announced in September 1993. Four prisons are already under private sector management, contracts for two new prisons will be awarded shortly, two market tests of prisons have been completed and a further market test is planned for this year. In addition, contracts are now in place for private management of the court escort and custody service in half England and Wales.

Ms Church: Now that the Home Secretary has realised that the proper priority for the prison service is to improve security and control drug-taking in our prisons, why does not he realise that the best steps to be taken would be to abandon the policy of market testing and concentrate on those priorities?

Mr. Howard: The facts do not support the hon. Lady's assertions. For example, the first two contracts on escorts have saved the taxpayer more than £10 million a year, the courts now receive a better service and escapes have been reduced by more than 40 per cent.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Dowd: Will the Prime Minister join me, and I am sure the whole House, in sending our deepest condolences to the family of Mr. Malcolm Murray, who died in Leeds general infirmary yesterday? Does he share the anger that we feel at the fact that he was in Leeds general infirmary because he had to be flown by helicopter some 200 miles after a fruitless search for an intensive care bed in London? Does not that demonstrate conclusively that the bed closure programme that the Government are pursuing in London has gone too far? Is he aware that he can do something immediately by instructing his Secretary of State for Health to accept the recommendation of the South-East London health authority that Guy's hospital must not close?

The Prime Minister: This is certainly a tragic incident and I share the view that the hon. Gentleman expressed about that. I believe that the whole House will join me in extending my deepest sympathy to Mr. Murray's family upon his death. This is a serious case and the South Thames region has set up an urgent investigation, the outcome of which we must await. The full facts of the case are not yet in front of me, but I understand that Mr. Murray required a highly specialised form of treatment with which Leeds was particularly able to help—*[Interruption.]*—a highly specialised form of treatment, and that was the medical decision that was taken. Beyond that, we will have to wait for the result of the inquiry.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Has my right hon. Friend seen that interest rates in France have had to be raised by 1.5 per cent. this week, notwithstanding the fact that—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Hamilton: Has my right hon. Friend seen that interest rates in France have had to be raised by 1.5 per cent. this week, notwithstanding the fact that inflation is

virtually non-existent and that unemployment stands at 12.5 per cent.? That has been necessary in order to confirm France's status as an economic vassal state of Germany. Is it not therefore a cause for congratulation for our Government that we were not obliged to take the same course of action this week? Should we not make more of the fact that both the Opposition parties are committed to such a ruinous policy?

The Prime Minister: There is, indeed, a great deal of exchange rate turbulence, which has reflected itself in the interest rate increase in France, to which my hon. Friend refers. As I have told the House before, there has been a pretty massive flight into deutchmarks as a result of an unsettled international situation. That is the principal underlying reason that has led to such difficulties for the franc. As I told the House some time ago, I see no prospect of the United Kingdom returning to the exchange rate mechanism for some time. I have made that point perfectly clear. The fundamentals of the British economy are such that I am delighted that we are not suffering precisely the difficulty that France has.

Mr. Blair: Is it true that, when Ministers proceeded with the sale of electricity shares on Monday, they already knew that the electricity regulator was actively considering announcing a cut in prices?

The Prime Minister: There have been some distorted versions of what has happened, so I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to set out precisely what the circumstances are.

The fact is that Professor Littlechild did not decide to undertake his review until Monday afternoon, after trading had begun in shares in PowerGen and National Power. But, although the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry were aware that he was considering the possibility, he had not notified them even on Monday morning—when stock exchange trading began—that he had made any decision to go ahead.

I should also tell the right hon. Gentleman that the Treasury took independent financial and legal advice at the end of last week on whether, in the light of the possible uncertainty, the share sale prospectus was still accurate. The legal and financial advice that it received was that, even if the issue of price controls for the regional electricity companies was reopened, that was not material to the share sale of the generating companies. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] That is the legal advice that hon. Members say is rubbish. As for the generating companies, they are subject to a wholly different basis of regulation. It was in the light of that legal and financial advice that the Treasury decided to proceed.

Mr. Blair: That may have been the legal advice, but may I ask the Prime Minister about the duty of his Government? Will he confirm that the Government knew that the regulator was actively considering making such an announcement? That is the first point. Secondly, if they did know, does the Prime Minister not think that it would have been better to disclose the information to prospective investors?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman will have heard me say just now, that was precisely the point of seeking the legal advice: to determine whether the prospectus was right. The right hon. Gentleman himself is a distinguished lawyer—*[Interruption.]* I suspect that, if the Government had sought legal advice on an issue of this sort and then not taken the legal advice that they had been given, the right hon. Gentleman would have been at the Dispatch Box asking why we had not taken the legal advice that we had legitimately sought and received.

Mr. Blair: I thank the Prime Minister for his compliment about my being a lawyer, but surely the point—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I expect better behaviour from Ministers.

Mr. Blair: I cannot say that we do, Madam Speaker.

The question relates not to the legal advice, but to the responsibility of the Government. Does the Prime Minister not think that it would have been better to disclose that information? Never mind whether the Government were legally entitled to it; does he not think that it would have been better to disclose it? Or is the short truth that a privatisation programme already damaged by boardroom excess and customer complaints is now tarnished by at best incompetence and at worst double dealing by Government?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has now asked the same question three times. I answered his third question with my first answer, and I made the position clear in my second answer. Other than to get in his ritual soundbite, I am not sure why the right hon. Gentleman has asked his question a third time.

The fact is, as I have said, that the Government were aware that the regulator was considering the possibility at some stage in the future. He had not notified the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, even on Monday morning, of whether he had determined to proceed, and whether he had determined what his statement would be.

That is the purpose of ensuring that the prospectus is right; that is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer took legal advice. On the basis that it was right to proceed—that the prospectus was accurate—my right hon. and learned Friend proceeded. If he had not, the right hon. Gentleman would have been standing there asking why the sale did not proceed and why the Government did not take the legal advice that they had sought in order to do so.

Mr. Michael Spicer: On the question of exchange rate turbulence, does my right hon. Friend agree that the recent rise in the deutschmark against the pound is good for British exporters to Germany and bad for German exporters to Britain? Would it not be a bad thing if we were ever again to shadow the deutschmark?

The Prime Minister: We are not shadowing the deutschmark and I do not anticipate that we will. At the moment the performance of British exports makes it clear that both British industry and the British currency are performing well.

Mr. Ashdown: Why does the Prime Minister not cut the legal waffle? The real question is not what is legally possible: it is what is right. Is the Prime Minister proud that his Government had to hoodwink the public to get them to buy their electricity shares?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is not a distinguished lawyer. If he lets fly like that I hope that he is never sitting down where he has to take a cool, calm decision of what is in the national interest. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would care to read the three answers that I gave to the right hon. Member for Sedgefied (Mr. Blair). Perhaps upon several readings of them he will know the answer to his question.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that devolving power to schools and hospitals has led to improved educational standards and more patients being treated? Would the imposition of an unnecessary layer of regional government harm that success?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it most certainly would. There are forms of devolution that I favour, most notably devolution down to the family and to the local community so that they can make their own decisions. We are certainly not committed to regional assemblies. There seems to be some confusion among the Opposition as to whether they are. On Sunday the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said:

"We are not committed to regional assemblies."

The deputy leader of the Labour party said:

"No, I don't say that is the position."

There seems to be some confusion about that on the Opposition Benches.

Q2. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Burden: When the number of full-time employees in the civil service has fallen by 29,000 in the past five years and the number on temporary contracts has grown by 82 per cent. in the same period, why are managers in the Employment Service being encouraged to sack temporary workers rather than let them have employment rights? Does the Prime Minister not realise that constant job insecurity is one of the biggest factors preventing any kind of feel good factor?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman took a wider view rather than being concerned with the point that he mentions, he would also have mentioned the dramatic fall in unemployment in every region of the United Kingdom. Self-evidently, work loads in Departments fluctuate, and by limiting periods of casual employment Departments are obliged to fill permanent vacancies with permanent staff, as they should. That is what is happening in the Department of Employment.

Q3. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to consider those seven schools in west Norfolk that have become grant-maintained? If he visits those schools he will find high morale and excellent motivation and commitment. Is it any wonder that more and more Members on the Labour Front Bench want to send their children to grant-maintained schools, and is it any wonder that the public find that grossly hypocritical?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to hear that there are seven grant-maintained schools in my hon. Friend's constituency. I hope that there will be more in every constituency in the future. Education is an important ladder that helps people to raise themselves to a higher standard of living. Grant-maintained schools offer a wide choice, which I commend to everyone and congratulate everybody on taking. I trust that everybody will ensure that it is open to all who wish to have it.

Mr. Enright: In spite of the headlong rush into vegetarianism, does the Prime Minister agree with Bob Reid, the former chairman of British Rail, that he would rather put money into a butcher's shop than into rail privatisation?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman should have heard what else Sir Bob said. He also said:

"I do believe that privatisation is right."

The hon. Gentleman failed to mention that.

Q4. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lidington: Although I welcome my right hon. Friend's efforts to secure peace in Northern Ireland, does he agree that, until terrorism has been eradicated, it is right that we should continue to support the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 to secure the protection of our fellow citizens in every part of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I do agree with that. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made clear yesterday, we shall retain the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 as long as the powers are needed for the protection of the public in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. I should add that we have accepted independent advice that all of the powers in the Act continue to be necessary and justified. My right hon. and learned Friend made that clear to the House yesterday.

Medium Support Helicopter

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Will the Secretary of State wait until hon. Members have left? I hope that they will do so quickly and quietly. This is an important statement for which the House has been waiting for some time.

Mr. Rifkind: With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about support helicopters.

Following a detailed assessment, the Government have concluded that a high priority should be placed on enhancing the tactical mobility and flexibility of our forces in the changed strategic environment. The Army has an operational need for additional support helicopters to enable it to meet its current and its prospective tasks.

Our evaluation of the operational requirement has concluded that only the Westland utility EH101 and Boeing Chinook are capable of meeting our particular needs for a medium support helicopter. As a result, in December 1993 I authorised the start of parallel negotiations with the two manufacturers. Our evaluation of the respective offers from the two companies is now complete.

We have concluded that, bearing in mind the increasing importance of retaining flexible forces, there would be advantage in operating a mixed fleet of utility EH101 and Chinook support helicopters. Following the parallel negotiations, we have therefore decided to procure 22 utility EH101 support helicopters and a further eight Chinook HC mark II aircraft. The costs of introducing an additional helicopter type into service and creating a mixed fleet are inevitably higher than those of an all-Chinook fleet, and this means that a direction is required to the accounting officer that the Government have taken into account wider implications in reaching their decision. The accounting officer has advised that, if the Government conclude that the overall benefits outweigh the costs, it is possible to choose the mixed fleet with propriety. That is the Government's conclusion.

The EH101 is a modern design and offers advantages of operational flexibility. Those include commonality with the Royal Navy's Merlin helicopter, which will be of particular significance in land and sea-based operations. The EH101 will also provide a middle lift option between the Chinook and the Lynx light support helicopter, which will remove the need to replace Wessex with a new helicopter. The additional Chinooks are required because some large loads can be carried only by that aircraft, which is a reliable and capacious helicopter, proven in Royal Air Force service. In addition, we are procuring a further six replacement Chinooks to maintain the current fleet, taking into account expected attrition losses. Those orders are subject to satisfactory completion of contracts.

In reaching this decision, the Government have also taken full account of the wider implications for the aircraft industry. They have invested some £1.5 billion in the development of the EH101 family, which is central to Westland's comprehensive design and manufacturing capability. The EH101 has excellent export potential in both its military and its civil variants, from which the Government will derive substantial financial benefit through the levy on sales. Our decision demonstrates the confidence that we have in that new British aircraft.

I am sure that the House will wish to join me in welcoming this decision, which will increase our existing medium support helicopter capacity by 70 per cent. At the same time, it will help to secure the future of the United Kingdom helicopter design and manufacturing capability and so strengthen the United Kingdom's aerospace industry, which provides important opportunities for United Kingdom suppliers as well as technology skills, both within and outside the aerospace industry. This decision will bring a substantial increase in capability for our armed forces as well as industrial and employment benefits. I commend it to the House.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House because, as you so wisely reminded us, Madam Speaker, we have waited a long time for this statement—eight years to be precise.

We welcome the announcement because the Labour party has always championed the Westland EH101. We think that today's news is important for not only the armed forces but the United Kingdom defence industry. It is important because it means that we have increased our helicopter capability for lift and—this is vital—we have maintained a helicopter building capability here in the United Kingdom. I know that the House will welcome that.

We welcome the Secretary of State's conversion to the idea that competition is not the sole criterion for purchasing equipment such as this. We commend him for the way in which he has decided to take into account the future of the United Kingdom defence industry. That is wise and the Opposition support him in that.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that this helicopter order is the one that was originally announced to the House on 9 April 1987—eight years ago? Can he explain why we have had to wait eight years for the announcement? Can he also explain why we have lost jobs and export orders because of the Government's indecision about placing the order and their failure to gain the endorsement of the helicopter by our armed forces?

Will the Secretary of State tell us what offset arrangements he has with Boeing? We understand that he has placed an order for eight new helicopters and six further replacements. Does that mean that we get 100 per cent. offset costs, or is it a higher level because there is a larger order? If there are offset arrangements, will he give the House the categorical assurance that those arrangements are not merely in the form of what I might call metal-bashing, but also involve United Kingdom high-tech industry? We think that this is a good announcement. It has been a long time in coming, but we are glad that it has finally come.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his general welcome, but I found some of his later remarks confusing and confused to say the least. He suggested that I am moving away from the principle of competition. He seems to be unaware that in evidence to the Select Committee about a year ago I said that we had a preference for a mixed fleet and that, assuming that the mixed fleet would meet our requirements, that was what we would wish to go for. That is the basis of the approach.

Part of the reason for the time that has elapsed was to ensure that we could extract from both companies the best price available.

On offset, yes, there will be proper offset arrangements on the Boeing aircraft. The hon. Gentleman asked why we have had to wait since 1987. For an Opposition defence spokesman to be unaware of what has changed since 1987 shows a lamentable grasp of the international situation. It is not only the Labour party that has changed since 1987. We have seen the end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the Warsaw pact. *[Interruption.]* Yes, perhaps they are of the same order as the changes in the Labour party and with the same consequences.

The House would have expected us to have a full strategic consideration of the continuing need for support helicopters and that is what we have done. I believe that it is right and proper to go forward with a major order of this sort so as to maximise the flexibility and deployability of our armed forces to meet the new strategic requirements.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, as I announced the purchase of the 44 Merlin EH101 helicopters, I especially welcome this announcement because it is a vote of confidence in the further development of the EH101? Will he ensure that the Ministry of Defence gives every encouragement not least to our Italian partners in this venture to take part in the programme and start the export development of this valuable new piece of equipment which, I believe, has considerable potential around the world?

Mr. Rifkind: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for his contribution to the development of the programme. He is right to emphasise the fact that it is a joint British-Italian programme. The Italian Government expect to purchase the aircraft, which will be welcome for Westland and in terms of the export potential of this very impressive aircraft.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I am tempted to say, "At last," but, as I do not wish to sound too curmudgeonly, I shall say that this order, although late and less than was originally promised, is nevertheless very welcome. It is especially welcome for the reasons outlined by the Secretary of State. It is a vote of confidence not only in the quality of the aircraft but in the quality of the work force and management that produced it.

Is the Secretary of State aware that it will open possibilities for sales and strengthen Westland's position? There is an especially interesting competition going on for the Westland Merlin in terms of the US navy's helicopter requirement, and I should be grateful if he will confirm that the Government will give their full support as they have in the past. Will he confirm that the decision also opens up the possibility of much wider use of the EH101 throughout our armed forces and in NATO where, if properly supported, it has the possibility of becoming a NATO standard?

Mr. Rifkind: There are important economic and employment implications associated with the decision. For example, including the EH101 sales that are likely to take place overseas, it will provide on average more than 1,100 jobs a year for the next 30 years. In addition to Westland in Yeovil, companies such as Rolls-Royce at Bristol, Smiths Industries in Cheltenham, GEC Marconi in Basildon, Martin Baker in Uxbridge, Racal Electronics in Slough, Lucas in Birmingham and a number of other important companies in various parts of the country will benefit from the work involved in this project.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that this is welcome news not only for my constituents but for many people in the west country? Will he accept on behalf of all of us—Conservative and Labour Members—who fought so hard to get this order, congratulations on the way in which his present ministerial team and the previous one fought our corner and fought not only the internal battle within the MOD, about which we should perhaps not say too much, but a little battle, or skirmish, with the Treasury?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend. The important point to emphasise is that the decision is extremely welcome from the point of view of the armed forces as well as from the point of view of industry. Not only are we announcing a 70 per cent. increase in the lift capability of our armed forces, but we shall be doubling the number of support helicopters available on the front line. That is why the armed forces have today signalled their very warm welcome for the decision.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Secretary of State asked what had happened since 1987. Does he agree that since then the Wessex, which entered squadron service in 1964, has been subject to heavy use and that it is a rather expensive helicopter to run? I welcome the statement, but does he accept that there will still be some residual doubt about the heavy lift capacity that may be relevant in the fulfilment of future international commitments and in the use and deployment of the air mobile brigade?

Mr. Rifkind: Today's announcement will remove the need to replace the Wessex with a completely new helicopter because the EH101 is of a category that will enable us to meet that need.

As for the total lift capability, of course, if one had an all-Chinook fleet, because of the larger size of the Chinook and its greater lift capability, the total increase in lift capability would have been even more than the 70 per cent. to which I referred. One has to balance that against the flexibility available through the mixed fleet decision. As the EH101 is a smaller and more agile aircraft, it can use landing spots that the Chinook would find more difficult and it is more suitable for land and sea operations, especially working with the Merlin, of which it is a variant. So there are operational benefits to take into account as well.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Does my right hon. and learned Friend appreciate that Westland Isle of Wight is the second largest plant in the United Kingdom? According to its managing director, Chris Gustar, this order means that the company and the Isle of Wight's economy—it is such an enormous part of our economy on the island—have really turned the corner. In view of that excellent order, will my right hon. and learned Friend see what we can do to get the helicopter into the coastguard service as well as the military?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend and confirm that this is very good news for the Isle of Wight. We shall be interested in supporting the helicopter's use in other areas, if it proves suitable, and in doing all that we can to assist Westland to increase its export potential because the

[Mr. Rifkind]

overall impact will have a continuing profound effect on employment and industry for a generation to come, and we can work with the company to help to encourage that.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): My right hon. and learned Friend's decision will also be warmly welcomed in my constituency, where many Westland workers and senior management live. It is a timely decision, given the forthcoming IDEX exhibition, which is to take place in the middle east in the middle of March, where there will be all sorts of opportunities for us to promote the aircraft in export markets. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues will give all support to the marketing of the excellent civilian version of the EH101, which is also on offer.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, there are three variants—the utility, the maritime Merlin and the civil variant—and it is important to try to maximise the export opportunities for all those forms of helicopter. The Ministry of Defence is especially interested in two of the three categories, but the order announced today will undoubtedly have benefits across the spectrum of equipment that Westland has on offer.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Does my right hon. and learned Friend realise that congratulations are due to him on the announcement of the order? Many of us have constituents who work in the plant and without the order the British helicopter industry would have been severely in doubt. It is, therefore, immensely important. When does he expect the first batch of helicopters to be delivered to the RAF and over what period will deliveries be extended?

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance that the Ministry of Defence and the Government attach to the helicopter industry continuing in the United Kingdom and to the need to sustain that support with the sort of order that we announced today. I understand that the first deliveries of the EH101 are likely to be in 1999 and that they will continue thereafter.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, in addition to the list of large companies that he said would benefit from the order, many small specialist companies, such as Fireproof Tanks of Portsmouth, which are competing in the international market, will be given greater prestige because they are associated with the decision?

Mr. Rifkind: Indeed, Portsmouth will benefit. Fireproof Tanks is one of the companies that will be participating in the production of the helicopter as a result of today's decision.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware how important the decision is, not only to Westland but to the aviation industry, including the avionics industry, which is a large employer in my constituency. He will shortly have to make a decision about the attack helicopter for the Army. Without pre-empting his decision in any way, will he assure the House that he will be just as mindful of the need to support and promote the British high-technology aviation industry, including avionics?

Mr. Rifkind: The attack helicopter is a separate issue and will be considered on its merits. A number of serious bids have been put forward to the Ministry of Defence and are being evaluated. I hope that we will reach a conclusion before the House rises for the summer recess, but it is a complex and difficult matter. We will certainly share our decision with the House as soon as we have been able to reach it.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that this announcement will safeguard jobs in my constituency and elsewhere throughout Somerset, and will also be a major fillip to the defence and manufacturing industries in the south-west. Can he confirm to the House that, in addition to the UK industrial and export factors that rightly weighed with him, there is a strong defence factor in choosing the EH101 in such numbers to take account of the changed nature of potential warfare?

Mr. Rifkind: My main responsibility has to be to consider, in the broadest sense, the defence requirements of the United Kingdom. That required me to take into account, not only the need to sustain a military helicopter manufacturing capability, but the benefits that flow from the mixed fleet because of the versatility that that provides for our armed forces.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If it has taken eight years for the Minister to make that statement, when is the date of the next general election?

Mr. Rifkind: It will be less than eight years, but the hon. Gentleman will have to wait.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): May I put a question to my right hon. and learned Friend in his capacity as a member of a Cabinet that proceeds on the principle of collective responsibility? I ask him, even now, to reconsider the balance of the country's interests as between investment in helicopters and investment in literacy. Is he really content that more than £1 billion should be spent on a helicopter order while £30 million is denied for central Government support for the generalisation of the reading recovery programme? In Warwickshire, we have a clear and urgent preference to be allowed to have the resources to pay for the educational basics.

Mr. Rifkind: I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety to ensure that that aspect of his interest is properly safeguarded. I hope that he will also understand that it is not only desirable in general policy terms to ensure that our armed forces are equipped with the most suitable equipment to carry out their tasks, but that it could mean the difference between life and death for those whom we send to carry out those tasks on our behalf.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that the decision to buy a mixed fleet of helicopters will be very much welcomed by many of us who have for long felt that that was the best way to meet the future needs of our armed forces' vertical lift capability. Will he ensure that those helicopters are delivered to the Royal Air Force on time and on cost, and that any suggested modifications by the Ministry of Defence are considered closely, to ensure that they are

necessary, and that the aircraft reaches RAF service on time, instead of reaching it delayed and at an increased cost?

Mr. Rifkind: It goes without saying that the armed forces have an important and urgent requirement for those aircraft. We expect both the Westland EH101s and the Boeing Chinooks to be delivered on the basis of contractual arrangements that we shall enter into, and we intend to ensure that both companies meet that requirement in the months and years to come.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I warmly welcome the commitment made in ordering the helicopters, but will my right hon. and learned Friend expand on his plans for helping export sales? Which countries does he expect to take the initial interest, and how exactly does he intend to go about it?

Mr. Rifkind: We have a Defence Export Sales Organisation, which works closely with industry. My hon. Friend will appreciate that it would not be wise for me to speculate on individual countries at this stage. I can say that a number of NATO and non-NATO countries have expressed serious interest in the EH101, and we and the company will continue to liaise with them to discover whether that interest can be translated into firm orders.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm certain quality aspects of the EH101? I heard this morning, on radio, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) suggesting that the only reason why the Canadians did not buy that helicopter was that we would not give confidence by making an order ourselves. In fact, Westland won the order completely on its own merits, and the Liberal Government coming into power in Canada cancelled the order. Will he further confirm that—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) congratulated them on doing it within a week of their coming to office.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Defence Research Agency has done studies about the vibration and the fatigue that Chinook pilots experience because of the old technology, and that the EH101, which suppresses that vibration, overcomes the problem so that pilots can fly longer?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right on both accounts. The Chinook is older—some 30 years old—whereas the EH101 is a state-of-the-art aircraft and therefore much more impressive. My hon. Friend's earlier point is correct. Once again, he shows the superiority of his knowledge compared with that of the Opposition spokesman. The previous Canadian Government had ordered the EH101, but the Canadian Liberal party chose to campaign on a pledge that it would cancel the order if it won the election. It did win the election and, notwithstanding the interest of the Canadian armed forces, the order was cancelled. I see that the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale is desperate to comment on that.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I well understand the concern of the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) about the Canadian effect on Conservative politics, but I shall not comment on that.

On the more serious helicopter issue, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the Canadian Government are actively considering ordering EH101s for their search and rescue service?

Mr. Rifkind: Naturally, if they are prepared to reconsider the decision, we shall be delighted. They are currently subject to certain legal claims from Westland because of the cancellation of the contract. If that leads to reconsideration, we shall all be delighted.

Business of the House

3.55 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week. The business will be as follows:

MONDAY 13 MARCH—Second reading of the Gas Bill.

TUESDAY 14 MARCH—Second reading of the Atomic Energy Authority Bill.

Motion on the Miners' Welfare Act 1952 (Transfer of Functions of Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation) order.

WEDNESDAY 15 MARCH—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Estimates Day (second allotted day): debate on support for business, consumer and investor protection, energy programmes and administration, in so far as it relates to the Department of Trade and Industry's support for the development of broadband communications; followed by a debate on administration, in so far as it relates to the Department of the Environment's retail planning policy. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

At Ten o'clock, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding excess votes, the spring supplementary estimates and defence votes A.

THURSDAY 16 MARCH—Until about Seven o'clock, proceedings on the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill.

Debate on the Commonwealth, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 17 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 20 MARCH—Second Reading of the Child Support Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 15 March to consider European Community document Nos. 9508/93 and 8251/94 relating to hallmarking.

The other information that I can give the House, which is not as complete as I would like but which I hope will be helpful, is that, on Thursday 23 March, I anticipate Government business of an ordinary kind until about 7 o'clock, followed by a debate on a motion for the Adjournment. *[Wednesday 15 March*

Estimates Day (2nd Allotted Day)—Relevant reports: Class IV, Vote 1, in so far as it relates to support for the development of broadband communications: Third Report from the Trade and Industry Committee, Session 1993-94, (HC 285-I), Optical Fibre Networks; DTI, Creating the Superhighways of the Future: Developing Broadband Communications in the UK, November 1994, CM 2734.

Class VII Vote 7, in so far as it relates to retail planning policy: Fourth Report from the Environment Committee, Session 1993-94 (HC 359-I), Shopping Centres and their Future.

European Standing Committee B, European Community Documents (a) 9508/93, (b) 8251/94, Hallmarking; Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports (a) HC 48-iii (1993-94) and HC 48-xxiv (1993-94), (b) HC 48-xxvii (1993-94).]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information.

Does the Leader of the House acknowledge that it is strange to have scheduled for Monday 20 March the Second Reading of the Child Support Bill, which I gather comes into operation later next year, whereas important regulations that involve changes to the workings of the Child Support Agency, which are to come into operation from April—next month—have not yet been laid before the House? As those regulations are extremely important and complex, will he ensure that hon. Members have sufficient time to consider them? Will he also assure us that, because of the Bill's complexity, sufficient parliamentary time will be allowed for debate at all stages—including, if necessary, Report on the Floor of the House?

Two private Members' Bills received their Second Reading last Friday, with strong support from both sides of the House, as was the case with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. As those measures have received widespread support both inside and outside the House and across the political spectrum, the Government should be willing to facilitate further discussion of the Bills by ensuring that they go to Committee. Parliament can then make a decision about the issues involved, rather than being frustrated by procedural devices.

Will the Leader of the House ensure that there is a ministerial statement early next week to report on the poverty summit in Copenhagen, not least because so little has been said or written by Ministers about the Government's attitude to that potentially important summit?

Will the Leader of the House also ensure that Ministers have the opportunity to clarify another issue which, following Prime Minister's Question Time today, I think requires further clarification—the Government's role in the electricity privatisation and regulation fiasco?

As the Prime Minister acknowledged today that Ministers were aware that the electricity regulator was considering a review of the price mechanism, and that they even took legal advice before the flotation of National Power, and as it is absolutely clear that consumers have been overcharged and that shareholders—both individuals and pension funds—have been ripped off, surely the time has come for Ministers to reveal to the House the full extent of their involvement.

Ministers should not hide behind legal advice and say that they were not compelled to disclose information—so much for open government from that group of Ministers. We need an urgent debate, so that Ministers can face their responsibilities to consumers, shareholders and to the House.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I might take the points made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) in reverse order. The hon. Lady will understand that there was a substantial exchange about the electricity issues that she has touched upon during Prime Minister's Question Time not long ago. I thought that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out the position very clearly, and I am not able to add to that.

As to the hon. Lady's penultimate question about the conference in Copenhagen, she will know that my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker is acting for Britain at that social summit. I think that she is very well qualified to do so, and that she will make Britain's position completely clear.

The second of the hon. Lady's questions related to private Members' Bills—she put her questions in what I would describe as a more sophisticated form than usual. However, I have no plans for providing Government time to discuss private Members' Bills or of departing from the usual practices in relation to private Members' Bills.

Lastly, on the Child Support Bill and associated matters, I entirely take the hon. Lady's point about the regulations. We will try to ensure that they are available and are debated in good time, because, as she said, they are due to come into effect sooner than the Bill. Of course, a Bill takes a good deal longer to pass than a set of regulations. The hon. Lady is already making demands for time later in the Session, which constitutes a good reason for getting on with the legislation.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I am very glad that there will be a debate next week about the Commonwealth, and that excellent organisation the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Will my right hon. Friend try to provide some time for a debate on Hong Kong, the China economic region generally and the report of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on that subject, which was released some time ago? It is a long time since we debated Hong Kong in the House.

Mr. Newton: As the debate on the Commonwealth responds to various representations made to me from both sides of the House during the past few weeks, I think that I have demonstrated my willingness to listen to representations of the kind that my hon. Friend has made. I shall not make any promises at this stage, but I will certainly look carefully at what he has said.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Although I have no doubt that Baroness Chalker is "acting for Britain", as the Minister put it, will he go much further and confirm that a Minister will have the chance to come to this place to account for Britain's actions—particularly for what is perceived as Britain's lamentable performance in its responsibilities to the rest of the world—following the social summit in Copenhagen? Will the Minister confirm that there will be a statement, or at least that there is the prospect of one?

Given that the matter that has concerned hon. Members urgently today and was the subject of the first question to the Prime Minister was the failure of the emergency services to come to the rescue of the man injured in Kent last night, who died in Leeds general infirmary, can we examine how the accident and emergency services—all of them—work and the way in which we inquire into them?

The Marchioness inquest is next week and there are many who are unhappy that, in the last few hours, people are having to scrabble around for money to pay for the legal representation of the bereaved of the 51 who died in an accident on the Thames six years ago.

Mr. Newton: I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's last point to the attention of my right hon. Friends. I cannot add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about the tragic incident involving the man from Kent. As he made clear, an investigation is under way, so it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Apart from the fact that, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has reminded me, there will be questions on overseas development matters on Monday week, which will provide an opportunity for adverting to these matters, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's comments about Britain's record. Indeed, Britain's bilateral aid programme is widely regarded as one of the most effective in the world. This year's budget is the sixth largest across the globe, and it is absolutely unquestionable that we lead the way on debt reform.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): May I press my right hon. Friend a little further on his reply to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) on Hong Kong? If my memory serves me aright, it is a long time since the House had the opportunity to have a full debate on Hong Kong. In view of the vast political developments there and the impending handover to China, I hope that my right hon. Friend would considerably favour an early debate on the topic.

Mr. Newton: I repeat what I took as the friendly and constructive answer I gave my right hon. Friend, and ask my hon. Friend to take it as embracing my attitude to his request also.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): The Leader of the House was present a short while ago the Prime Minister answered three questions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). I advert particularly to the third question and answer. Would the Leader of the House, bearing in mind the precedent set over the Al-Fayed allegations about payments to Members, when the House was reassured by the Prime Minister that Sir Robin Butler had carried out an—*[Interruption.]* Madam Speaker, will you tell the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) to shut up or put up?

Madam Speaker: Order. I have cautioned hon. Members on both sides of the House before on barracking from sedentary positions. There is far too much of it in the House, and far too many times it comes from certain hon. Members. I also caution hon. Members that we are in the middle of business questions, and that questions put to the Leader of the House should be directly related to next week's business. I hope that such a question will now be put.

Mr. Bermingham: It is coming indeed, Madam Speaker.

As I was saying to the Leader of the House, we were reassured by the fact that Sir Robin Butler had carried out an investigation. Later inquiries before a Select Committee revealed that no investigation had been carried out. Today, we are assured that advice was taken from counsel with regard to the electricity sell-off.

Madam Speaker: Order. I really must have a business question now. I have listened long enough to a preamble which is really an argument. *[Interruption.]* I need no help whatsoever from the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw). I now insist that I have a direct question from the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham). I have heard enough of a preamble.

Mr. Bermingham: All I want is for the Leader of the House to put in the Library of the House a copy of the questions asked of counsel, so that we can then debate whether they were the relevant questions that should have been asked of counsel.

Mr. Newton: I have already made it clear in responding to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) that I am not in a position to add to what my right hon. Friend said, which I thought was very clear.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): Will my right hon. Friend find some time soon for a debate on education, so that we can explore the refusal of the East Sussex Liberals to fund a teachers' pay award in full, when there is plenty of money in the budget to cover it, while at the same time they are frightening governors, teachers and parents into signing a petition demanding more taxpayers' money?

Mr. Newton: I will investigate whether it is possible to find time to debate important issues such as that which my hon. Friend raised, so that they may be fully explored.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Perhaps I may turn that into a cross-party call for an education debate, in the light of Government policy initiatives that emerged recently. Before Christmas, there was a much trumpeted and much welcomed, if belated, Government commitment to new money for nursery education. Last week, the Secretary of State for Education advised local authorities to fund the gap in their budgets by taking money out of pre-school education.

This week, a cessation of funding for the reading recovery scheme was announced, just at the time that the scheme is demonstrating its success in improving literary standards in schools. It is important—

Madam Speaker: Order. Perhaps the Whips ought to arrange seminars on how to put business questions, which are not meant to provide an opportunity for hon. Members to make statements first on their point of view. Their purpose is to ask why the business of the House cannot be changed to allow debate on a certain issue. Hon. Members are taking far too long to explain themselves.

Mr. O'Hara: I was simply asking whether the Leader of the House agrees that such important policy initiatives merit the attention of the House.

Mr. Newton: A variety of important matters merit the attention of the House. I set down a number of them for debate next week, and at present I am not able to satisfy the request of the hon. Gentleman and of my hon. Friend for a debate on a different subject.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement on early-day motion 763.

[*That this House notes the honourable Member for Leicester West, as Chairman of the Employment Select Committee, is interviewing leading industrialists and businessmen on their remuneration packages whilst at the same time offering these people his services on how to improve their public speaking and presentational skills; further notes that other services offered by the honourable Member for Leicester West include advice on making people redundant and serving on the Remuneration Committee of Ladbroke plc which awarded the Chairman of that company a salary of £583,000 per annum—£108,000 per annum more than the Chairman of British Gas plc—and in addition awarded five directors of the company 1.3 million share options worth £2.3 million; believes that these activities represent a conflict of interest with his current position as Chairman of the Employment Select Committee; and calls on him to resign immediately.*]

During the passage of trade union legislation, the Department of Employment received a letter from Ladrokes calling for the abolition of wages councils. Is the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Janner), who serves as a board director, opposed to abolition?

Mr. Newton: I saw a number of references in the press during the week to the position of the hon. and learned Gentleman who is Chairman of the Employment Select Committee. People will form their own views on that matter, which ultimately must be one for the hon. Gentleman's judgment of what is proper under the rules of the House.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we debate next week the document "Open Government: Code of Practice on Access to Government Information"? I presume that the Leader of the House has read that document, so can he say whether all parliamentary answers given by Ministers meet the criteria in that code of practice?

Mr. Newton: They do, so far as I am aware. If the hon. Gentleman has reason to believe that they do not, he had better let me know and I will take the matter up in the appropriate quarters.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on local government spending? An issue of great importance to my Sutton constituents, who suffer under the yoke of a Liberal-controlled local authority, is that that authority plans to spend £150,000 on a new bus route, which is completely unpopular with local residents and will wreck their peace and quiet. They do not want that bus route, but want the money spent on social services and helping the elderly.

Mr. Newton: That sounds like a good example of the many local authorities which say that they do not have money to spend for purposes that the public want, but which spend money for purposes that the public do not want.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): May we have a statement on the privatisation of utilities? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, when the Tory Government privatised rain, it resulted in water board chiefs lining their pockets? We now know that an 83-year-old disabled ex-miner is being asked by a water board to pay £11.75 to have a tap washer fitted.

Mr. Newton: All those issues have been extensively ventilated over a long period, and no doubt some will be further ventilated in the first two days of next week, when the House debates the two Bills that I mentioned. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his point then.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): May we debate next week the serious issues arising from early-day motion 763, so that the House may decide whether to refer that matter to the Nolan committee for an assessment of the position of a Select Committee Chairman, when such a glaring conflict of interest has arisen?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has raised an entirely legitimate point. I do not think that I can add to what I said about the rules of the House and the necessity both for the Chairman and for any Committee concerned to make a judgment about the application of those rules.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Having heard what both the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister have said about the tragic death of Malcolm Murray, I ask the right hon. Gentleman to reconsider the position. Next week, there will be written answers that will provide sufficient information for the House to take a view. In the light of the statement made today by the new Minister with responsibilities for the citizens charter—

"I find it astonishing that there was nowhere else in London where he could have been taken to. This just goes to show the need for a proper range of facilities within a reasonable distance"—

will the Leader of the House find time to arrange a debate, so that the Secretary of State for Health can answer questions about an appalling tragedy in London?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and later I myself have said about the matter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is due to answer questions on Tuesday next.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to enable us to discuss the prison regime? I shall then have an opportunity to give my full support to the military-style boot camps that are so popular in the United States. Although we have become extremely tough on criminals, the debate for which I ask would reinforce to my constituents that we shall become tougher still on criminals. With the drilling, marching and forced running in all weathers that takes place with criminals in boot camps in the United States, reoffending has been cut from 60 per cent. to 13 per cent. We should have such a regime in this country as soon as possible.

Mr. Newton: I shall bring my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I cannot promise an opportunity for an early debate on prison matters. As I have said on several occasions, they may fall to be considered when we have the results of some of the inquiries that are taking place.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the Leader of the House provide time for an early debate on a Government announcement today that will have a serious impact on passenger transport in South Yorkshire? The Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs has reversed—through a press release and not in a statement in the House—the recommendation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission that would prevent the Mainline bus company in South Yorkshire from operating in the way it wants.

The decision flies in the face of what is called for by the local chamber of commerce, local organisations and Members in the area. It will mean more bus congestion and more pollution. Above all, it may threaten an employee share ownership company. Everyone in South Yorkshire believes that the decision has been sneaked out through a press release to stab in the front a successful and thriving company that is owned by its employees.

Mr. Newton: Whatever may have happened, I am certain that the purpose was not that ascribed to it by the hon. Gentleman. I shall bring his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friends the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend advise me whether we should be having a debate on, or a Select Committee investigation into, the number of Labour Members who are benefiting from share option schemes, the ways in which those Members are benefiting, and whether the benefiting goes from the very bottom to the very top of the Labour party?

Mr. Newton: I do not know whether any of that is thought to be happening in Birmingham. My hon. Friend may have noticed that there is to be a debate on local government in Birmingham on Wednesday.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate next week on the current state of political parties in Britain? When I arrived home in my constituency on Friday last, I found the following statement in the local newspaper:

"Top Tory quits over sleaze."

One of my constituents, Councillor Roy Newman, was the vice-chair of the Rother Valley constituency party. He has resigned because he believes that the party has lost its way, that leadership does not exist, that it is riddled with sleaze, and that, at the same time, the poor are becoming poorer while the rich are getting richer. I would like to express my constituent's thoughts as soon as possible.

Mr. Newton: I have already made reference to the debate next Wednesday on local government in Birmingham, in which one or two somewhat different perspectives on some of these matters may emerge. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman can work in any relevant remarks while remaining in order, but he might like to try.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): May I support the call for a debate on education, which would unable us to debate assisted places, which is of great interest to hundreds of families in my constituency? In spite of cynical window dressing and talk of co-operation between the private and public sector, the Labour party proposes to abolish those assisted places, to the disadvantage of hundreds of low-income families in my constituency.

Mr. Newton: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), my hon. Friend has given an excellent reason for seeking a possible debate on education. That, too, I will bear in mind.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As the Leader of the House has been helpful in giving us a debate on the Commonwealth, I shall be equally helpful and suggest a debate next week on state funding of political parties.

In view of the report in today's edition of the *Daily Record*, which said that Tory party treasurer, Lord Hambro, returned from a fund-raising trip to Hong Kong empty-handed, the Tory party is in need of some assistance. I want to know why or how it is able to get a £14 million overdraft from the Royal Bank of Scotland, the chairman of which is Lord Younger of Prestwick—it does not have any collateral, does not own its

[Mr. George Foulkes]

headquarters, and has no basis on which to get that loan—when some of my constituents cannot even get a loan of a few hundred quid from the Royal Bank?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his offer of help.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): May I remind my right hon. Friend of the conversation that he and I had a week last Friday and the letter that I subsequently wrote to him on 27 February concerning the establishment of the meat hygiene service, which is due to become operational on 1 April this year? Does my right hon. Friend consider it appropriate for the House to debate those matters, in the light of the fact that that new service will have a budget of £50 million?

Because the House does not sit tomorrow, however, it will not be possible to give sufficient notice of the establishment of that service, and the necessary statutory instruments will not be able to be laid within the prescribed time. Does my right hon. Friend feel, as I do, that the House should be able to debate those important matters, not least because the approval of the House has already been assumed and staff have been appointed to that new service, offices have been taken on all around the country, and the whole industry is expecting it to be operational on 1 April, yet it has not technically been approved by the House?

Mr. Newton: I remember my conversation with my hon. Friend. I also have a copy of the letter and the fairly voluminous enclosures he sent me. I have not yet had the result of my inquiries on the points he raised, but I will of course come back to him as soon as possible.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): May I join my hon. Friends the Members for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) in urging a debate on early-day motion 763? The House has debated conflicts of interests of hon. Members before, but there can have been few greater conflicts of interest than that of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) in his dual role of Chairman of the Employment Select Committee and principal of an employment consultancy that gives advice on how to make people redundant.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend's remarks, coming after those made earlier, do indicate some concern about those matters. I hope that that will be reflected on by the hon. and learned Gentleman, but I cannot say more than I have already said.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): When the Leader of the House responded to the question of his hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who made an unwarranted smear on every Labour Member of Parliament but did not name anybody, he then tied in next week's debate on Birmingham with that smear.

Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Minister responding to next week's debate to come and tell us about the Tory leader of a council in the midlands who, it has recently been disclosed, has a prison record, and a Tory mayor in the midlands who was recently in gaol for rigging the electoral system? That is what we do not want in a proper debate in the House. We want to debate public probity and finances. I ask the Leader of the House to ensure that the debate is on a proper level and not the level, he indicated in his answer to the hon. Member for Dover.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman may wish to take part in the debate on Wednesday, and I am sure that it will be approached with proper seriousness by my right hon. and hon. Friends. But since, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have considerable regard for him and I am frankly sorry to have upset him, I make it clear that I certainly intended, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Dover intended, no slur on him or any particular Member of Parliament.

Point of Order

4.24 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, in the course of an exchange during the debate on the prevention and suppression of terrorism reported at column 373 of the *Official Report*, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), having quoted me, went on to say:

"Of course at that time he was not so contaminated with IRA/Sinn Fein".

My hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) sought to have the hon. Gentleman withdraw that comment, and Madam Deputy Speaker said:

"I think it was just about within the bounds of the way that we deal with things here".—[*Official Report*, 8 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 373.]

I find that a strange statement, for a number of reasons. In the seven years that I had the honour to represent my party on Northern Ireland matters, at no time, in any way whatever, did I have any dealings with the IRA or provisional Sinn Fein, unlike Her Majesty's Government. Such a comment about an appointed spokesman of the Labour party reflected also on two former leaders of my party and upon the fact that what I was advocating were the principles established by the Labour party conference and the national executive committee of the Labour party. They have been accused of being contaminated by IRA/Sinn Fein.

What is within the bounds of what we are allowed to say in the House? Membership of the IRA, a proscribed organisation, is subject to a period of imprisonment of up to 10 years. To address a meeting of three or more people soliciting support for or advocating the aims of the IRA is also a punishable offence, in gaol or otherwise. That I am accused of having been involved in, and that was within the bounds accepted by Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not think that we can accept that.

Finally, with regard to etiquette of the House, that attack was made on me without any forewarning. I have written to the hon. Gentleman today telling him that I intended to make this statement, and, had he been in his place, I would have taken this opportunity to set out his record and responsibility for the many unhappinesses that have happened in Northern Ireland during the past 25 years.

Madam Speaker: Let me say at once, and far from the first time, that I deprecate very strongly indeed the use in debate of words which reflect on the probity of other Members. In that context, I have looked at the exchanges in the *Official Report* to which the hon. Member refers. I conclude that the phrase to which he objects was not so disorderly as to demand its immediate withdrawal. Nevertheless, for all that, I deprecate most strongly its use, and I repeat my general plea for good temper and moderation as characteristics of parliamentary language.

I say to all Members who participate in our debates, in terms that I think the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) may take note of, that we should remember the injunction of St. Paul to the Philippians:

"Let your moderation be known to all men."

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is an experienced Member of the House, and he does not need my advice on the courses of action open to him. I hope that he will feel that I have dealt with the matter, although perhaps not in a way that is entirely satisfactory to him, in a sensitive manner. I appreciate all the work that he has done over the years on Northern Ireland, as do many of us in the House.

Orders of the Day

South Africa Bill [Lords]

Order for Second Reading read.

4.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

More than 30 years ago, Hendrik Verwoerd took South Africa out of the Commonwealth—exited before being pushed—because of the apartheid policies of the then South Africa; so the return of South Africa to the Commonwealth last year is a cause for celebration in all Commonwealth countries.

The intervening 34 years were dark years for South Africa—years of isolation. It was isolated from the west because it offended human and democratic values, and isolated in Africa because of its treatment of Africans and others. But South Africa was not forgotten; we knew that change must come. Change has come, and there has been a special sense of joy throughout the Commonwealth at South Africa's decision to return to the family of the Commonwealth.

The main purpose of the Bill is to modify existing legislation to place South Africa on an equal footing with other Commonwealth countries. It involves purely technical amendments to a number of Acts in order to apply them to South Africa; those amendments are set out in detail in the schedule to the Bill. The immigration and electoral implications of South Africa's return to the Commonwealth have been dealt with separately by an Order in Council made in June last year, which added South Africa to the list of Commonwealth countries included in schedule 3 to the British Nationality Act 1981.

We are determined to do all we can to support the reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa. Immediately after the South African elections last year, Britain committed a total of £100 million of aid to South Africa. We gave support to the reconstruction and development programme—support welcomed by South Africa.

Welcoming my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to South Africa last year, President Mandela made it clear that

"we in South Africa, and I refer both to my government and the people as a whole, are particularly thankful for the commitment shown by your government to help us deal comprehensively with the legacy of apartheid".

The Prime Minister and President Mandela have agreed the areas of focus for our bilateral aid. They are in education, health, supporting good governance, including local government, encouraging the development of business and enterprise, and support for agriculture. Our assistance to South Africa is driven by the needs of the South African people.

We have offered help with the arrangements for the local elections in October this year, and with the regional integration of the South African police service. We have also offered co-operation in the fight against drug trafficking. About a third of our aid funds for South Africa are currently spent on education. Our assistance is intended to increase access for disadvantaged South Africans to education and training opportunities. We have a clear commitment to supporting South Africa through our aid budget.

To succeed, however, South Africa needs more than aid; it needs investment and trade. The United Kingdom is the largest overseas investor in South Africa: our investments have an estimated book value of £2 billion, and a market value estimated at between £8 billion and £10 billion. In July last year, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade led a party of British business men to South Africa, and launched a trade and investment campaign called "Opportunity South Africa"—a campaign to include seminars, trade fairs and further high-level missions to promote investment in South Africa.

Funds will come from both private and public sectors. There will be support for small businesses, and exchanges between UK industry and South African postgraduate students. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced that an additional £1 billion would be available in ECGD cover.

My right hon. Friend also announced a British investment promotion scheme to encourage more small and medium-sized UK companies to invest in South Africa by providing grants towards the cost of pre-investment feasibility studies and the training of local employees. One part of the campaign, for example, is the Soweto skills initiative. Young entrepreneurs from Soweto will come to Britain to gain management experience with British companies. Forty trainees are coming to Britain this year; six have already arrived.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, on his visit to South Africa last September, took with him a further team of senior business men. During his visit, he and President Mandela signed an investment promotion and protection agreement, which is aimed at encouraging investment by British companies in South Africa.

In January, a full-scale trade promotion campaign for this year was launched, called "Britain means business". The campaign will include two high-profile commercial events in South Africa during the year. First, immediately following Her Majesty the Queen's state visit later this month, a series of seminars will be held in Cape Town: they will cover invisibles, education and health care. At the same time, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will be in South Africa, accompanied by a team of senior United Kingdom business people, to meet South African Ministers and business people to discuss urban regeneration, airport development, and electricity distribution to ensure a guaranteed supply of electricity to the townships.

The transition to a democratic society which is no longer based on the principle of racial discrimination requires a sound economic and financial basis. We are determined to do all we can to support investment in projects and people in South Africa.

There is a steady strengthening of relations between Britain and South Africa, and that is warmly welcomed on both sides. At the end of next week, Her Majesty the Queen, the Head of the Commonwealth, will pay a state visit to South Africa, the first such visit for nearly 50 years. That visit, which I know is eagerly awaited in South Africa, will set the seal on the revival of an old and mutually beneficial friendship between our two countries.

South Africa and its people have triumphed over division and racial injustice. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister concluded in his speech to Parliament in Cape Town:

"South Africa has come out of the storm and into the calm, out of isolation into fellowship, out of division into unity".

South Africa is forging a single, non-racial, democratic nation at peace with itself. That is a formidable challenge for the years ahead. The road ahead will have dangers, but South Africans have already travelled the greater distance on their journey. They have the full support of the British Government and the British people as they work towards the goal they have set themselves of regeneration and reconstruction. South Africa's re-entry to the Commonwealth, her coming home to where she belongs, should also provide a stimulus for the Commonwealth family of one third of the world's nations.

The emergence of the new South Africa is a particular cause for rejoicing here and across the Commonwealth. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.36 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I confess that it is quite a novel experience for me to support without hesitation the Second Reading of a Government Bill whose brief text reflects a historic event—the return of a multiracial South Africa to the family of the Commonwealth.

On 20 July last year at a service in Westminster Abbey, South Africa was welcomed back into the Commonwealth. It was fitting that on a day of such celebration the congregation was addressed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a man who somehow managed to endure the darkest days of apartheid without losing either his spirit or his smile.

Archbishop Tutu compared the event with the tale of the prodigal son. He said that South Africa had left the Commonwealth in 1961 and had squandered her riches during the years of apartheid, but that the international struggle and the pressure of her people had finally brought the country back to its senses. He added:

"like a prodigal she has returned home".

The Commonwealth which South Africa left consisted of only 11 nations. Now its 51st member, South Africa, can look forward to a range of benefits, including wider trading opportunities, which will benefit South Africa and other countries. Nigeria, Malaysia and India are among those countries which have sent trade delegations to South Africa in the past year, and they have all had an increase in trade.

South Africa's emphasis on regional co-operation as part of its foreign policy is in marked contrast to the policies that were pursued under apartheid. It will certainly assist in bringing stability to southern Africa as a whole, thus benefiting its Commonwealth neighbours in the region. On the level of co-operation between peoples, we shall now have the pleasure of South Africa's participation in the Commonwealth games, which are traditionally known as the friendly games.

For those reasons among many others we rejoice in South Africa's return to the Commonwealth. That means, of course, that there is no longer an ambassador at South Africa house. The new high commissioner, Mendi Msimang, is the former African National Congress representative in the United Kingdom. He has spent a considerable amount of his time over the years standing in the street outside South Africa house in the company of thousands of other people. I am sure that all hon. Members will wish to welcome him to his new position.

In May, just three months before that service at Westminster Abbey, I had the privilege to witness, along with other hon. Members, the first free election in South Africa's history. That was a truly remarkable event. It was a tremendous experience to be there. We watched in awe as long queues of patient voters waited for hours, often in hot and cramped conditions, without any opportunity even to have a drink of water, and determined to express their collective relief, enthusiasm and expectation at the end of apartheid. That was a defining moment in South Africa's history.

That was my second visit to South Africa. My first, as a journalist, was in 1975. The country I then visited was different. I witnessed hatred, intolerance and immorality. I saw poverty of staggering proportions in what is still one of the richest countries in the world. I talked to black people in the homelands who watched their children die from measles because they could not afford the vaccine to treat the measles. I saw hospitals in which the surgeon had to send instruments 30 miles down the road to be sterilised. I saw women scratching a living from the soil, forcibly parted from their husbands, who had to stay in the towns. That was the reality of homeland life in South Africa.

At the same time, however, I saw courage and fortitude. I visited the Kwazulu legislative assembly, where black person after black person went to the microphone to declare that they were prepared to die for their freedom. That courage, as well as the humanity and extraordinary lack of bitterness among so many black South Africans, are the key to the changes taking place in South Africa today.

It is just five years since President Nelson Mandela was released from prison. The intervening years have brought changes so vast and so irreversible that the South Africa of old seems to belong to a different age. Despite the centuries of oppression, and against the expectations of even the most optimistic forecasts, a sense of unity and progress has emerged among enemies to transform our ideas of what is possible in politics.

We salute the forbearance and vision of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Thabo Mbeki and their colleagues. We pay tribute to Oliver Tambo, Chris Hani, Joe Slovo and others, including the many thousands of nameless South Africans of all colours who helped to fight the evils of racism.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): While the hon. Lady is giving congratulations and salutations to those people, would she find room—which she may have planned to do later in her speech—to salute the courage of F.W. de Klerk, who, in some cases, has stood out almost as a pariah in his own community? He took a step that was alien to many members of his party and the white community. He should perhaps be equally congratulated by the hon. Lady as she gives her salutations.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am pleased to add my congratulations to President de Klerk. The reality that he recognised was the mark of a true statesman. I wish that the hon. Gentleman had played such an honourable part in the many debates that have taken place in the House over the

[Mrs. Clwyd]

years. We remember his role during the years when so many other people were pointing out the evils of apartheid and fighting those evils in the House.

Mr. Carlisle: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Clwyd: Not again.

Mr. Carlisle: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Lady perhaps impugns or, indeed, questions my honour in this place. In criticising the honour of another hon. Member, was she was within parliamentary procedure on the conduct of debates? She did mention the word "honour" in relation to my attitude to debates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): As I heard the hon. Lady, she did not say that the hon. Gentleman was dishonourable. She questioned the contribution that he had made. On balance, there has probably been a fair debate, but I hope that no comment of an adverse nature to any hon. Member will be made. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber hold strong views. The Bill has clearly united all hon. Members. I hope that the debate can continue in that context.

Mrs. Clwyd: We are all encouraged by wider developments in the region. The past year has seen successful democratic elections in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and Botswana, together with the restoration of democracy in Lesotho and the signing of the Angolan peace agreement. Those events give us cause for optimism that real progress will be made in South Africa. At the same time, the fragility of the peace in Angola serves as a reminder that we must also be wary.

Labour Members are proud of the role that we played in the campaign to isolate the apartheid regime. My hon. Friends the Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) took positions of leadership in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which mobilised thousands of committed people in that struggle. My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) also took an active role in that campaign. I should also like to pay tribute to the role of Bishop Trevor Huddlestone.

The Commonwealth played a proud part. The apartheid regime engaged in the systematic use of armed forces and economic destabilisation against majority-ruled states in southern Africa. It backed terrorism elsewhere, yet the Commonwealth Heads of Government remained steadfast in their support for the liberation forces in South Africa.

In 1986, the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group produced a report supporting sanctions against the apartheid regime. Membership of that group included a former Conservative Prime Minister of Australia and a former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom, who had considerable economic interests in South Africa as chairman of the Standard Chartered bank.

Unfortunately, our Government ignored that report. For a long time, they refused contact with members of the African National Congress, whom they regarded as terrorists. Despite the intransigence of Baroness Thatcher's Government, the Commonwealth continued to play an active role in the ending of apartheid, right up until the final days of that hated regime.

All hon. Members will rejoice in the ending of apartheid, but let us not suppose for a moment that the fight is over. South Africa still has massive problems to overcome in terms of economic, social and political development. The country has unique problems. According to some indicators, it has a relatively developed economy, but we know that the vast majority of its people live in conditions that are comparable with those in developing nations.

The national average for infant mortality among black South Africans is higher than the average in Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. According to United Nations Children's Fund data from the period 1980 to 1991, among the 10 neighbouring Southern African Development Community states, only Tanzania had a higher percentage of underweight children than the rural areas of South Africa.

Thirty per cent. of the black adult population of South Africa is illiterate, and a further 30 per cent. are considered to be functionally illiterate. That compares with adult illiteracy rates of 9 per cent. in Tanzania, 26 per cent. in Botswana, 27 per cent. in Zambia and 33 per cent. in Zimbabwe. The World bank believes that half the black work force is without formal sector employment. By any estimate, the number is probably over 6 million.

Although the number of black senior managers has doubled in the past few years, they still make up less than 4 per cent. of the total. In the interests of peaceful change, for the present, affirmative action has been downplayed. Of about 40 million people, 17 million probably live below the minimum subsistence level. We are talking about a country in which, during the last decade, one sixth of the population earned two thirds of the income.

As blacks were merely temporary urban residents under apartheid, housing was deliberately neglected. Soweto, which, not long ago, was a new township, is now a city of 5 million. Just a few hundred migrant workers' hostels house up to 1 million people. There are over 200,000 squatters in the Pretoria and Johannesburg area alone and the population of the region is expected to rise by 80 per cent. by the year 2010.

A disproportionate number of households in poverty are headed by women and World bank research makes the point—we have made it time and again in the House—that investing in women's education probably provides the highest return on any investment in developing countries.

The skewed provision of health care was perhaps one of the cruellest effects of segregation. A black baby was 10 times more likely to die in infancy than a white baby. Lack of clean water, the constant struggle for food and the overcrowded housing all exacerbated a polarised system that had health care as fine as anywhere in the world for the few and a life expectancy worse than much of sub-Saharan Africa for the majority.

The problems facing South Africa emphasise the scale of the commitment needed from the rest of the world. The economy has been facing inwards for so long that it will be a slow and difficult process to restructure it. The campaign to disinvest from South Africa was a necessary support for the end to apartheid, but now we need to reverse that flow of capital while ensuring that it will help positive change rather than strengthen existing inequalities.

The reconstruction and development programme, known as the RDP, is the cornerstone of the new Government's policy to eradicate those problems. Its first

priority is to attack poverty and deprivation. As the Minister mentioned, specific proposals include employment creation, redistribution of land, building over 1 million new homes, providing clean water and sanitation to all and providing universal access to health care. It also seeks education and training from the cradle to the grave, together with the modernisation of industry. Above all, it wishes to extend and to deepen democracy. I think that we all agree that that last point is essential to meet the challenges facing South Africa.

Later this year, the first local government elections will be held in South Africa. Unfortunately, voter registration for those elections is dangerously low. It is vital that the people register if the important elections are to be given democratic legitimacy. Of course, the elections are extremely important for the complete democratic transformation of South Africa.

I welcome the technical support provided for the elections by the Commonwealth and the Overseas Development Administration. The United Kingdom and the wider international community have a duty to respond positively to requests for assistance. In particular, British local government can play a role in helping the new non-racial local government structures after the election.

We must welcome the decision of the Inkatha Freedom party to end its two-week-old boycott of Parliament last weekend. Whatever the rights and wrongs of its case, the issue of regional autonomy in Kwazulu Natal continues to threaten the future of the Government of national unity.

For all those reasons, while rejoicing in the progress made in South Africa, we must not assume that its problems are yesterday's problems and that our task is complete. There are a number of ways in which the United Kingdom could help South Africa to overcome the devastating legacy of apartheid. Our voice in the United Nations, including the Security Council and the key specialised agencies, as well as in the European Union and the Commonwealth, puts us in a unique position of influence in all those forums. This month the EU will be sending a fact-finding mission to investigate industrial co-operation. It will probably highlight the opportunities awaiting closer co-operation.

British investment accounts for 40 per cent. of the total foreign investment. Britain is South Africa's second most important trading partner after the United States. I acknowledge the United Kingdom's aid commitment to South Africa, which totals £100 million over three years. However, I am disappointed that that is less than half the cost of the unwanted Pergau dam, or about the same as the bonuses promised to a handful of top executives at Barings.

We could also offer vital assistance if we were to support South Africa's inclusion in the Lomé convention, but in a way which benefits South Africa and does not harm the wider regional interests. The fourth Lomé convention is an aid and trade agreement between members of the European Union and 70 ACP—African, Caribbean and Pacific—countries. In fact, 95 per cent. of the ACP's population live in sub-Saharan Africa. At present, South Africa is not covered by the convention.

Lomé IV lasts for 10 years, from 1990 to the year 2000. A joint mid-term review must be completed by the end of this month. Among other things, the review is re-examining national contributions to the European Development Fund which finances Lomé. The United Kingdom is the third largest contributor after Germany and France, but the Government have given notice that they intend to cut their contribution to that funding by 30 per cent. I should like the Minister to explain the rationale behind that proposal because the Commission proposed that the budget should increase from 11 billion ecu to 14 billion ecu for 1995-2000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having some difficulty relating the hon. Lady's comments to the Bill.

Mrs. Clwyd: When the Bill was discussed in another place, there was a fairly wide-ranging discussion on South Africa.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. All sorts of Bills are discussed in all sorts of places in all sorts of ways. I am purely responsible for the debate in this Chamber. I have made my point and I hope that the hon. Lady will respect that.

Mrs. Clwyd: We are talking about the contribution that this country can make to the future of South Africa. One of the ways we are doing that is, hopefully, by passing this Bill.

It is disgraceful that Britain is the only country that has called for a considerable reduction in its cash contribution to Lomé. Once again, we are the odd man out in Europe. I think that the point is sufficiently made.

President Mandela made it clear in his opening address to the South African Parliament last month that South Africa has no desire to detract from the efforts to help poorer countries within the ACP. Whether South Africa should be granted full membership or a looser form of association is open to discussion, but what is important is that a substantial relationship with the European Union is being sought by the South African Government as a matter of urgency and this country has considerable influence in that. Those matters can and will be pursued on other occasions, perhaps when the Conservative Whip is absent.

On behalf of the Labour party, I greatly welcome the return of South Africa to the international community and the Commonwealth. We fully support the Bill.

4.59 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): This Second Reading debate is a good opportunity to welcome, on a bipartisan or, indeed, on a tripartisan basis, the arrival of South Africa in the Commonwealth. I know that it joined last year, but we are tidying the legislative requirements arising from that. This is also an opportunity to comment briefly on the entirely new and changed South Africa that is emerging and on the changed Commonwealth, something to which the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) referred.

This debate also enables us to comment on the changed policies which the United Kingdom has been developing, is developing and will need to develop to respond to the circumstances being legislated for in the Bill.

We have all watched, sometimes with sadness and sometimes with high hopes, the ups and downs of South Africa as it has emerged from its horrific past and the prospects that have now opened up for all its people. About four years ago, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs visited South Africa and expressed the hope that this day would soon come and that the British

[Mr. David Howell]

Government would realise that a completely new set of policies and approaches were required on aid, training, assistance and, especially, on development.

We have begun to learn that aid, or the amount of that aid, does not necessarily equal development. The whole world now recognises that other motivations and mechanisms are at work which are possibly more effective in boosting development, especially in a country such as South Africa which has a vast infrastructure already in place and where there is a curious mixture that is often commented on: it is a first-world economy sitting in the middle of third-world economies.

We very much hope that South Africa's politics will work as a result of the courageous actions of a number of people who have already been mentioned in this debate. I hope in particular that South Africa's new leaders have the skill, not only to be adaptable in their economic policies—they have given some signs that they are in realising that private, inward investment will be the driving force of the new South Africa for which we are legislating—but to approach their governmental tasks in a way that allows some decentralisation and some autonomous rule. I hope that that will enable the views of Zulu and Kwazulu people to be accommodated. It appears that the leaders are just about managing to do that although there have been some tense developments, especially during the elections in April last year.

The new South Africa is full of opportunities and also full of needs that we have to meet in the most imaginative and lively way that we can. South Africa is joining a new Commonwealth whose membership, far from diminishing, is growing. It is striking that the new atmosphere in the Commonwealth—an atmosphere that will be reinforced by South Africa's full integration—is very different from that which prevailed in this country towards the Commonwealth and even in the Commonwealth gatherings of past years.

To be brutally frank, many people admired the good works of the Commonwealth but regarded it as a talking shop and a forum that was not fruitful when it came to advancing the interests of South Africa, the United Kingdom or any other of its members. That mood has gone. A signal that it has gone is that other countries are trying to join. They would not want to join a club if it were only a talking shop, and South Africa would not be wanting to join under the Bill if it regarded it as such.

As usual, the planners and grand strategists did not foresee what was happening. They wrote off the Commonwealth. They said that it was an interesting gathering of various worthy organisations but not part of the new global economic and geopolitical order. Their view is rapidly turning out to be wholly wrong. Something remarkable is happening.

The exciting new markets of the world, which will include South Africa if it gets its politics right, coincide increasingly with those of the Commonwealth countries. They are South Africa, parts of India, or certainly places such as Bombay and Bangalore, and Oceania countries—Australia and New Zealand, which is one of the sparkiest economies in the world. They include Singapore and, dare I say, Hong Kong and even Malaysia. I hope that, as a full member of the Commonwealth, South Africa will be one of the new and expanding markets where the opportunities for British trade and interests will be so valuable.

The Bill marks not only an important step in the history of South Africa but an important moment in the history of the Commonwealth. Another great, and potentially very great, economy is coming back into the global system. I cannot resist mentioning the fact that we have well under half our interests in the European Union and considerably more than half, in terms of our total overseas earnings, outside the European Union in the booming markets of Asia and, I hope, increasingly, South Africa. We should take note of the great change in the trend of world trade, which is relevant to South Africa and its membership of the Commonwealth.

As the Minister and the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, it is not only a matter of trade. It has been said that the United Kingdom's investment in South Africa amounts to some £8 billion to £10 billion, although the figure that I have is £10 billion. Investment is beginning to flow back into South Africa. That is crucial, especially when it involves people in South Africa putting their own money back into the country. It is a sign that the situation is turning around.

We can consider our own interests when passing this legislation and we need to consider not only our overseas trade and earnings but our overseas assets. The majority—80 per cent.—of our earning assets overseas are in South Africa and the booming Asian economies, on the Indian subcontinent and in Latin America. Up to 60 or 70 per cent. of our colossal invisible income comes from outside Europe, from the new markets.

I have long argued that, although we must get our relations right with the European Union, it is, as the Bill reminds us, to the new markets where we already have much of our investment, that we should address our foreign policy interests and around which we should adjust our aid, development, training and human resource policies to ensure that our country's interests are enlarged as well as those of South Africa, as it joins the Commonwealth.

I do not think that it is necessary for me to do so—I believe that it is fully understood—but I plead with the Government to bear in mind the fact that we are considering Britain's interests. We are not considering Europe alone; in bringing South Africa into the Commonwealth, we can also promote our own interests.

The Prime Minister had a very successful trip to South Africa last September, when he mentioned many of those issues and saluted the welcome arrival of South Africa in the Commonwealth. He was also able to emphasise a new aspect of our relationship with South Africa—one that would be enhanced once it was fully in the Commonwealth. That is relevant to the schedules in the Bill, which deal with some military aspects, albeit at one remove.

The Prime Minister surprised many people, as he said that we would be able to contribute to South Africa not merely by providing products—on those we have good and bad performance—or managerial skills, which are needed, but also by providing training for public administration, the military and the police and many other forms of human resource service of a type with which those of us considering categories of trade and investment are not usually familiar. He was touching on a very important new role for this country in markets such as

South Africa, southern Africa and the other Commonwealth countries that I described, which were written off and have suddenly turned out to be the booming opportunities of the future.

The British military advisory training team is operating in South Africa in just the way that the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs hoped that it would four years ago, and in the way that it operates in a number of southern African countries. Suddenly, the world is anxious to purchase our skills in military training and in integrating the different military groups that were fighting each other in and around the edges of South Africa.

Countries are anxious to purchase our skills in providing good public administration, local government, and police administration, as well as legal and consultancy—a range of skills at which this country happens to be extremely good, in ways that we perhaps do not always appreciate. If we move into the new markets, like that provided by this new member of the Commonwealth, we can successfully deliver such a service—to the benefit of the recipient and of our own affairs.

The Bill is a very valuable opportunity to ensure that we turn our policy away from—dare I say it—too much of an obsession with local affairs in Europe and Eurocentricity and towards our old friends, who have become our friends again in the Commonwealth structure, such as South Africa.

We have the opportunity to develop the resource exports and earnings that I described with South Africa and other countries in a way that we have not done in the past. We have the opportunity to ensure that South Africa has access to the European Union, of which we are a member. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley said that the European Union was interested in various aspects of aid to South Africa. She even suggested that the Lomé convention should somehow embrace that country. We want to make very sure that the European Union is open to South African goods, which it by no means is, and that our friends in the Commonwealth countries that are seeking to be booming markets—I hope that South Africa will be one—have an opportunity to market their goods in European markets.

We want to ensure that our aid and development policies are not entirely hijacked by countries with different priorities. As a global power, with global friends and markets, and long historical links with countries like South Africa, we must ensure that we are able to use our aid and development as much as we can to further those interests—to put it bluntly—rather than the different interests and priorities of other countries, which may want to use their aid and development as they wish. They should leave us to use our aid and development as we wish and to use it in our interests.

This is an important moment for the House, for South Africa and for southern Africa around it, which will, I hope, benefit from that country's increasing stability and economic prosperity. This is also an important moment for those of us who are interested in ensuring that our island and country has a strong place in the completely new global order that is emerging as we move into the next millennium.

5.14 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This is indeed a very happy occasion and I readily join members of others parties in welcoming the Bill and in welcoming South Africa back into the Commonwealth.

The Minister began by reminding us that Dr. Verwoerd led South Africa out of the Commonwealth more than 30 years ago, in anticipation of its expulsion. The Sharpeville massacre in 1960 was the single event that, more than any other, triggered the expulsion. As a student at Edinburgh university at the time, I remember my reaction as someone who had been at school in east Africa and I remember the deep sense of shock that went around the world. I signed up as a member of the new Anti-Apartheid Movement, little realising that later, when I came to the House, I would serve as its president for four years in the late 1960s.

I must also pay tribute to the many people who did not live to see the transition that we are celebrating today. I remember some of the people I worked with at the time, who were exiles from South Africa in London. One thinks of Ruth First, who was later blown up by a bomb. When I met her husband, Joe Slovo, at a very tricky point during the CODESA, Convention for a Democratic South Africa, negotiations in South Africa a couple of years ago, just after AWB—Afrikaanse Werstandsbeweging—thugs had driven through the wall of the convention building, he was in an extraordinarily optimistic mood. When I expressed great concern about the slowness and stickiness of the negotiations, he was bubbling away, saying, "No, no, have confidence. It's all going to work. We're going to get through these negotiations and see the transition." Before his death, he served for a tragically short time as the Minister of Housing in the new Government.

I think of people like Albie Sachs, who was also blown up by a bomb and remains severely injured to this day. I also think of people from the liberation organisations, who used to visit us in London when they were in exile—people like Oliver Tambo and Sam Nujoma, who is now the president of Namibia—and of the meetings that we used to have in those days. They were either small meetings here in the House or great rallies across the road in Methodist Central hall. On an occasion like this, it is right that we pause and remember those people.

I recall my first visit to South Africa in 1972 and the horrible conditions in which one had to meet people who opposed the Government. A pew in the Anglican cathedral was the only place that I was allowed to meet Helen Joseph, because she was under a banning order. I remember the brave women of the Black Sash movement, who did such practical work to alleviate the awful effects of the pass laws on individual citizens. I also remember the sports boycott campaign and later the sanctions campaign.

I also think of two people I knew in the Liberal party in South Africa. That party dissolved rather than accept the imposition of racism on political parties. Alan Paton and his party ceased to exist as a political movement, but other people formed the Progressive Federal party, which later became the Democratic party. Notwithstanding the racist nature of politics and the political set-up, they believed that they should try, however inadequately, to mount some kind of opposition within the parliamentary system.

[Sir David Steel]

The great Helen Suzman was outstanding among those people and was, for so many years, alone. Even though, in later years, I disagreed with her over sanctions, I remain an intense admirer of the skills with which she battled alone in Parliament, and we have remained very good friends. I also remember Colin Eglin, whose role as her successor and leader of that small party was far greater in the negotiations and transition than the electoral strength of the party would have suggested. All those people deserve to be honoured on an occasion like this.

The British Government always had a somewhat ambivalent posture, to put it mildly—I do not want to be controversial on a day like this—towards the South African Government. I went to South Africa again in 1986 as party leader. Although the British Government would not meet anyone from the African National Congress, they were happy to arrange for me to be hosted by our high commissioner in Lusaka, where the ANC had its offices in exile, and for me to meet Oliver Tambo and Thabo Mbeki in the drawing room of the British high commission. I could never quite get over the distinctions that the Foreign Office drew between contact and non-contact. It was a very positive discussion.

On that occasion, if the House will forgive one further reminiscence, I had my first meeting with Pik Botha. He took the wind out of my sails. It was a tense meeting because I had been refused permission to meet the current President Mandela—then of course prisoner Mandela—and I was naturally angry about that. I visited Foreign Minister Pik Botha, and he spent the first 10 minutes of a long meeting trying to persuade me that he was really a liberal and that, unfortunately, all those other people in the Government were preventing him from doing the things that he would like to do.

Mr. John Carlisle: He is a liberal.

Sir David Steel: Perhaps later he justified some of that reputation.

I looked up some of the notes of the meeting the other day. I remember one amusing exchange when he said, "You people who come from London pay far too much attention to the person of Nelson Mandela. After all, the chap has had no experience of Government. He has hardly ever made a speech; he has never held a press conference." As he obviously saw my jaw dropping, he added, "I don't suppose that was really his fault"—which, in retrospect, was the understatement of the year.

Anyway, those are past days, and now we glory in the transition that has taken place. Like the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), I had the great pleasure and privilege of participating in the South African elections and in helping the supervision and monitoring process in Natal Province during that election. What a heart-warming and emotional experience that was. President de Klerk deserves thanks and congratulations for the imagination that he showed in leading his country, and especially his party, away from the past and on to the process of transition that is taking place.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley quoted part of Desmond Tutu's sermon in that great service that we had in Westminster Abbey. I remember that when he finished his analogy with the parable of the prodigal son and South Africa returning home, he finished by saying, "and so we are having a party"—this in Westminster Abbey—and it was a great party. The country is about to have another party with the state visit of Her Majesty the Queen, which I am sure will be greatly appreciated by all races in South Africa. I trust that that visit will prove the seal on the act that we are performing today in passing the legislation.

I want to say three things about the future, because there is a danger of endless repetition of the same themes. Our future relations with South Africa are extremely important at the moment, especially in the investment sector. I listened to the list that the Minister gave of the aspects in which we were hoping to help in the public sector and in the private sector. I trust that it was only inadvertence that he missed out one important aspect—housing.

I believe that one of the great political problems that confronts the South African Government in its five-year period of transition and, perhaps more important, when they reach the end of that transition, is the failure to meet unreal expectations among the population. It is inevitable.

There was great excitement in the mass of population; apartheid was ending and President Mandela was being installed. There is a natural feeling among uneducated masses that jam will come tomorrow—but jam will not come tomorrow.

We can make fairly rapid progress in trying to improve housing conditions and, in so doing, we can produce some immediate employment. I hope that every effort will be made in the public and private sectors to increase investment in housing fairly immediately and dramatically.

Secondly, I believe that the regional role of South Africa is most important. I gladly follow the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in that theme. Since South Africa left the Commonwealth, the surrounding picture in Africa has changed out of all recognition for the better. Almost every one of South Africa's neighbours to the north, to the east and to the west are now democratic. The only one over which a question mark continues to hang is Angola. The change is there and it is real. It has been one of the most encouraging political developments in a globe that is not always full of good news, that the countries of southern, central and eastern Africa are becoming more democratic and are beginning to follow the norms of good governance.

South Africa itself is in such a dominant position economically that she needs to be the power house of the regeneration of the whole region. With the single exception of South Africa, I have noticed that there has been a tendency, in British and international political discussion, to write off Africa in recent times. That is why I was rather cheered by the speech of the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) to which we have just listened.

I hope that attention is returning to the needs of Africa, and that South Africa will be regarded as the pivotal power in that region, not as an isolated country.

Thirdly, I want to sound a word of caution. During the period of sanctions, it was inevitable, I suppose, that South Africa would build up an arms industry of its own. I know that there is intense discussion in the present Government about the future of Armscor. I hope very much that, whatever else happens in South Africa, it will not continue to be one of the arms-exporting industries countries of the world.

As recently as about 18 months ago, it was discovered that the South African arms industry had been supplying both sides in the Rwanda civil war. That is not a record of which the new South Africa should be proud, and I hope very much that the arms industry will not play a major part in the future economy of South Africa.

I conclude by joining, as I started, in congratulating all the people of South Africa who have made that transition possible, and welcoming them back into the Commonwealth. The people of South Africa have triumphed. They are at the moment in a mood of optimism, and it is up to us in the outside community to do our best to sustain that.

5.25 pm

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I welcome the chance to make a brief contribution, and to follow the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). I agree with a great deal of what he said. He took us very eloquently down the lanes of our recent memories. He mentioned several people, in South Africa and in this country, who are familiar to all of us, and we know of his long-standing interest, and indeed family background, in that part of world.

Without mentioning any further names, let me say something that emphasises what the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale said. I visited South Africa about 18 months ago, when we were discussing the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association contribution to the elections. I had on my right-hand side, at the then embassy, someone who had done 12 years in Robben Island, who now is a distinguished political servant of the present Government, and on my left-hand side a similar servant of the present Government, who had done 10 years. At that time, when one would have thought that the atmosphere would be becoming tense and the elections were approaching—and those people were then but African National Congress servants—I was unable to determine, throughout the dinner, an iota of enmity towards those who had oppressed them.

That is one of the best things that the new Government have in their favour. There are many other dangers, but the spirit of enmity—the spirit of revenge—was definitely not there. The balance that that peculiar island appears to have given to so many people who are now outstanding servants of a new country is remarkable. Goodness knows, we all wish it well.

In that spirit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you have given a wide licence to the debate because the Bill is very limited, I say that I very much welcome the readmission of South Africa to the Commonwealth. I do so on behalf especially of the British South Africa all-party parliamentary group, which I have the honour to chair.

The rivalries and divisions in South Africa, as with so many other things, were mirrored in the House. It is no exaggeration to say that one of the most acrimonious meetings that I have attended in the House took place in 1987, when we created the then British Southern Africa all-party parliamentary group as an alternative to the then British South Africa parliamentary group. Well in excess of 100 colleagues from both sides of the House were present. The meeting was bitter and divided. I was standing for a certain office. Other hon. Friends were standing for other offices.

I am not talking about the past. The old British South Africa parliamentary group is now a welcome part of our new British South Africa group. Indeed, only a few moments ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner), the last chairman of the old British Southern Africa group, was sitting next to me.

Mr. John Carlisle: He was the secretary.

Mr. Temple-Morris: And my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) was its chairman. Forgive me for getting the offices wrong. The important point is that, if that can be done in South Africa, we can do it at Westminster. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association will be mentioned a little later by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd). It, too, has an important role to play, as does the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

What has happened in South Africa is remarkable and I emphasise that the Bill can help in the process. The United Kingdom has much to do by way of training schemes—the police and the military have already been mentioned. We can also contribute by helping in local elections.

May I make just one point to my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell)? I do not mean it in an unduly debating way, because this is not that type of debate. I agree that we must support British interests and concentrate on new friends and markets, but we must not forget that, although South Africa is interested in this country, what is paramount is its access to the European market. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford mentioned that. When British people talk about going out to South Africa, we must bear in mind what we can do for that country. We have much to give and can also help in the European context.

That leads me to the most substantive point that I wish to make: the need to develop the South African economy. Such development is vital for the successful future of a country whose honeymoon period is virtually over. This is our first opportunity in the House to salute what has been happening, many hon. Members having had a little to do with it.

As we progress, we must recognise that South Africa is entering more difficult periods, which is why the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale mentioned the need for housing in developing South Africa's economy. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said, we are effectively dealing with two countries: a first division country and a developing country. When such a sudden transition takes place, triumphant though it is, there is a danger that it will be taken too rapidly. We must not encourage South Africa to get too carried away with it. It must keep its feet on the ground.

Through certain personal experiences, I have a horror of the extremes of export capitalism, if I may call it such. One has seen whole societies in developing countries taken apart, their whole way of life grievously disturbed and corrupted, which has led to revolution. I am sure that other hon. Members have had the same experience. A real danger exists in that respect for South Africa. The good news is that there are probably enough people in South Africa to steady the Buffs and bring the necessary reality into the picture. It is not for us to race at development.

[Mr. Temple-Morris]

We must realise that when we go to South Africa and take from it, we must also give to it. That is the sort of society that we have and why we can contribute.

Last, but not least, is the all-important question of access to the European market. We are members of the European Union so, nationally, we can do only so much. South Africa wants access to Europe and we should recognise that we can help in that respect. It is difficult to say that South Africa will become a member of Lomé, because of the diversity within the country. Perhaps we should accelerate either the process of membership or association with Lomé or some special bilateral agreement between the European Union and South Africa, so that South Africa knows where it stands with regard to access to European Union markets.

The main message is that we should act soon, and act above all for the benefit of South Africa.

5.34 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I contribute to this debate largely because, as the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) said, although the Bill is technical, this debate is our first opportunity to devote ourselves exclusively to the momentous events that occurred last year in South Africa. Those events were beyond our wildest dreams.

For the past three years, I have been a member of the executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, representing this country and the Mediterranean part of the Commonwealth. Throughout that period and before it, there was not a conference or meeting at which South Africa was not the focus of attention of the whole Commonwealth. Great fears were expressed by Sonny Ramphal, the previous Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. We seriously discussed what the Commonwealth would do to aid the small African countries surrounding South Africa if a bloodbath were to occur and how we would help them with refugees and by giving aid. Thank God that nothing remotely like that happened.

I pay tribute to two people, above all, who have brought the current position about—one black and one white. Incidentally, they both came out of a prison to do that. The black one is President Nelson Mandela, who suffered the indignity, disgrace and discomfiture of being imprisoned for most of his adult life, not for a crime which the rest of the world believed in but for his beliefs, his desire to improve the lot of his own people and his desire for democracy and the values that we all share in the House, whatever our party.

The white prisoner is Mr. de Klerk. South Africa would not be where it is today without Mr. de Klerk. He was a prisoner of a system—a cultural system of racism institutionalised by apartheid. He must have made many enemies within the National party and South Africa because he had the foresight to recognise that such a system could not continue in the modern world. He had the foresight to create the opportunity to bring Nelson Mandela out of prison, hold democratic elections, albeit supervised, and step down as president and allow a black man who had been in prison for most of his life to succeed him as president of South Africa. I therefore pay tribute to them both as they are both responsible for the present democratic state of South Africa.

Another reason why I speak in this debate is that, like the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd), I am honoured to be a governor of the Commonwealth Institute, which is the first institution named in the schedule to the Bill. It has a considerable part to play in helping this country and Europe to understand South Africa and what it means to bring that country back into the Commonwealth of nations.

The South African economy has been mentioned. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), who has temporarily left the Chamber, rightly said that many European institutions do not recognise the momentous events that have occurred, and South African goods are still banned from those countries. Even in this country, not everyone has caught up with the developments. We have long been accustomed, because of apartheid, not to drink South African wine, eat South African fruits or visit South Africa.

We must wake up to the fact that things have changed and organisations like the Commonwealth Institute can play a role in reminding people in this country that South Africa is now a democratic country that desperately needs exports and tourism. The institute and the Commonwealth officers must get the message across not only in this country but to the United States of America and to those European nations that have not caught up with the pace of events. That will be our welcome to South Africa as a new member of the Commonwealth.

I think that the institute can play an important role in that process. It was created from the old Imperial Institute by the House in 1958 and, as many hon. Members know, it has premises in Kensington. The institute will do its best to perform this additional duty in respect of South Africa, although it has recently suffered a considerable setback at the hands of the Government.

Despite an excellent Government report in its favour, the institute stands to lose 66 per cent. of its grant next year and 20 per cent. thereafter. Its Government grant will cease entirely in 1998-99. That is no way to treat an institution whose importance the Government recognise in the Bill by placing it first in the list of institutions that can help in welcoming South Africa back to the Commonwealth.

The institute is fighting back. Last year, it received more than £500,000 from various organisations; it is not sitting back and relying on Government funding or lying down to die because the Government grant is to disappear. It is fighting back, and it will win that fight. It will provide many new attractions, including exhibitions, seminars, conferences, displays and educational material about the newest member of the Commonwealth.

Tourism will be most important to South Africa. South Africa has sunshine—something that we in Europe need so badly—during our winter. We are geographically closer to South Africa than to India, Australia, or Thailand. It is very expensive to travel there at the moment, but I hope that tourism firms in this country will recognise South Africa's enormous tourist potential.

As well as the sunshine, South Africa has some of the best beaches in the world, game parks and great cities. It has a tourist infrastructure unequalled by most other African countries, with hotels, restaurants and caravan and camping grounds. It is a paradise for the tourist. Most important of all, South Africa has that hallmark of true

civilisation: people drive on the left-hand side of the road. That will certainly prove to be a big attraction for British tourists.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Would it not be a good idea for the Parliament to travel to South Africa in January or February for a joint session with the South African Parliament to discuss matters of common interest?

Mr. Oakes: I think that that is a superb idea. I would not inflict the rigours of a British winter on the new South African Parliament by inviting its members to this Chamber. I think that it is a great idea, although my hon. Friend's suggestion is made tongue in cheek.

I agree with the hon. Member for Leominster, who referred to our role in Europe. We can play an important transitional or bridging role in South Africa's development as the link between that new member of the Commonwealth and the whole of Europe. I do not believe that one cannot be a passionate supporter of Europe and a supporter of the Commonwealth. There is nothing alien about that. I emphasise that Britain can play an important role in bridging the gap between Europe and the Commonwealth. Tourists from this country, Germany, Scandinavia, Holland, and so on would flock to the South African sunshine if the tourist industry were to get its act together and provide holiday opportunities.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I agree completely with the right hon. Gentleman. Does he think that there should be more public pressure on the South African and the British airlines to increase passenger capacity on flights to South Africa? It is almost impossible to book a seat on a plane to South Africa from about November to February. That shows that the prices are too high and the passenger capacity is too small.

Mr. Oakes: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that private enterprise will take the lead—as it did in the case of Spain—and that some of the smaller companies will break the ring of airline prices by offering cheap fares and package tours.

Tourism is one of the few industries today that is labour intensive. It generates many jobs of all sorts—not just high-powered ones, but jobs for waiters, chamber maids and chefs—in the country that is the tourist destination. I hope that the Commonwealth Institute will urge the tourist industry to hold a seminar for educational purposes. It will be performing a valuable task not only for this country but for the Commonwealth as a whole.

Every member of the House—and certainly every member of the Commonwealth—warmly welcomes the return of South Africa to the Commonwealth of nations as a democratic country. As the hon. Member for Leominster and my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) said, South Africa will experience great difficulties. After the euphoria of gaining the vote, people will expect to secure jobs and own houses immediately. That will not occur within a year—it may not occur for a decade.

President Mandela and the Government of South Africa face an uphill battle. They have inveterate enemies within South Africa who want to see them fail. There is a tremendous groundswell of demand from the people of South Africa who have waited all their lives for the economic freedom that they do not yet enjoy. They will not have that freedom until the South African Government have sufficient resources to provide the necessary infrastructure, jobs, educational places, and so on.

This country—with our close historical bonds, our investments in and our love of South Africa—should take the lead in helping the South African Government to provide the economic liberty that the people of South Africa quite rightly demand.

5.47 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): It is a personal pleasure for me to address my remarks to the House in a somewhat calmer atmosphere than that which has greeted my comments on the somewhat thorny subject of South Africa in the past. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) said, in the spirit of "no revenge", I shall not try to wreak any on Opposition Members or upon my hon. Friends.

In the context of the South Africa Bill, I would like to lay to rest two old chestnuts that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) tried to revive. *[Interruption.]* I beg the hon. Lady's pardon if I have mispronounced the name of her constituency but, following the defeat at Murrayfield on Saturday, I have forgotten everything that might be supportive of her adopted country.

I totally refute the claim that I ever supported the system of apartheid. I said on many occasions on the Floor of the House that I considered it to be a gross violation of human rights. I worked to end apartheid. The difference between the hon. Lady and some of her friends and me is that we went about it differently. The hon. Lady and her friends and other opponents of the South African Government sought to end apartheid by chucking stones at a glasshouse. I respect their opinion and the way in which they waged their campaign. I felt—as my Government did to a certain extent—that contact with South Africa was necessary to ensure that change occurred from within that country.

In that context, the almost total castigation of all South African politicians who were members of that Government, and in some cases possibly of the then Opposition, was totally wrong, because many politicians in South Africa—the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) mentioned one of the most prominent ones—were totally against the system of apartheid and were working even within the National party, let alone on the liberal side, to have that system abolished. Mr. de Klerk, not at the time the greatest liberal of them all, had the courage to see that the system was not only unworkable but unacceptable to the rest of the world.

My second point is that I said in the House, even before South Africa had a change of Government, that I was looking forward to the day that it would rejoin the Commonwealth. It was a great sadness to many of us when in 1961 it voluntarily withdrew from the Commonwealth, with all the problems that it faced from that time onwards. I hope that we will welcome the Bill in a spirit of reconciliation and looking to the future; I certainly would like to do so.

In some cases, the effect of sanctions had some political advantages in changing the then South African Government's mind; but they also had, as I think members of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and others must recognise, a devastating effect on the lives of many South Africans.

[Mr. John Carlisle]

I found it strange that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley came to my constituency and, with great relish, in front of the press photographers poured bottles of South African red wine down the drain under some banner outside one of my public houses. I still have the photograph, if the hon. Lady would like to see it. That wine was produced in the Cape, mainly by those of non-white origin. Had the hon. Lady visited South Africa, as I did at the time, and spoken to the workers at those wine farms and in those factories, she would have appreciated that it was very easy, from the lush pastures of Westminster, to cry foul and support sanctions when they had a devastating effect on jobs, and realised the full implications of that policy on the people at that time.

This is not the place to argue about whether sanctions were correct or whether they had the effect that some would claim for them, but they brought enormous misery to many people and were not totally supported throughout South Africa.

I shall confine the remainder of my remarks to welcoming the resumption of sporting relationships throughout the Commonwealth and other bodies. As the House will know, that has been the force of my campaign ever since I entered Parliament in 1979.

I salute the leaders of the African National Congress and in particular President Mandela, who as soon as he began to have some political influence, even before he became president after the election last April, said that sports sanctions should be lifted. He surprised many observers, as that was a political weapon which he could so easily have used to beat not only the white politicians, who at that time still held power within South Africa, but those outside who did not wish South Africa particularly well. Almost as soon as he was released from prison, he instructed that the ANC should co-operate in terms of the bringing international supporting relations back to South Africa. I congratulate and salute him for that, although at the time it was a surprise to me and the rest of the sporting word.

It is one area in which contact was continued, in some cases in difficult and unfortunate circumstances. It meant that the aspirations of some South Africans, black and white, were to a limited extent still met in a system that was not acceptable to everybody: but, because many courageous sports administrators wanted to maintain and encourage sporting contacts with the rest of the world, in the early 1980s the then South African Government said that discrimination in sport was put on one side and apartheid laws such as pass laws did not exist for sporting purposes.

We welcome South Africa back into the Commonwealth. We welcome the fact that sportsmen and women are playing on international fields. They played a marvellous game in Auckland in the centenary test against the New Zealanders. We look forward to English participation—and possibly Welsh participation, in honour of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley—in the World cup in South Africa, and in particular the visit by the Lords and Commons IX in September to fly the parliamentary flag so well flown in this place by the hon. Member for Leominster and the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes). I know that many hon. Members are very much looking forward to that trip. As the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, the Commonwealth games, or the friendly games, are the place where South Africans have a chance to meet fellow sports men and women throughout the world, and the spirit of those games has improved over the past few years.

I take the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford that the Commonwealth now has higher standing than before. That is possibly because the thorny question of South Africa has now gone off the agenda. As the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) said, Sonny Ramphal, in his time as the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, seemed to spend most of his time berating the South Africans or trying to help those countries surrounding South Africa. The right hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to say that some of his worst fears were never actually realised. Perhaps the politicians in Pretoria were not quite the ogres they were originally thought to be.

The Commonwealth now has a chance to improve its image and, indeed, to become a greater power in a competitive international world. In business terms, South Africa will need an enormous amount of investment, and there are still those who are hung up on the old system. It is the duty of the House, and partly the purpose of the Bill, to ensure all the old adages and thoughts about South Africa are now swept on one side on the basis that it is a country that can give enormous impetus to the business economy in that part of the world. If it does so through trading within the Commonwealth, so be it; that obviously is to its advantage.

We can ill afford to ignore the part that South Africa has played, certainly in economic terms, over the past few years. I would say to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley that, even before the change of Government, South Africa was trading with some 49 out of 51 African countries, and in some cases helping them with their economies. The prospects are very good. The shadow over South Africa is its own internal problems, over which we have little control. They involve the tribal system, which is rife throughout the whole of South Africa and which is a proud tradition not only in the black population but in the white population. That, to a certain extent, is for South Africa to sort out, with our assistance, guidance and help.

I welcome the Bill. It is a joy for me to see South Africa back on an agenda to be talked about with pleasure, and back in the family of the Commonwealth. I salute the visit of Her Majesty the Queen within the next few weeks or so. It obviously will be an enormous boost to that country and I wish the Bill Godspeed through this place.

5.58 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Like every other right hon. and hon. Member in the Chamber, I welcome the Bill. It is perhaps a tribute to Nelson Mandela that he has created circumstances in which a Bill can be brought before the House that Members of all parties so warmly commend.

One of the reasons why Britain's relationship with South Africa is so important is that, because of the country's recent history, so many members of the present South Africa Government spent many years in Britain. I am sure that I am not alone in numbering as close personal friends a few members of the present South Africa Government.

When I was a student, I was lobbied on things South African by Aziz Pahed, who then worked in the ANC office in London and was deputed to lobby students. As deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in South Africa, he now fulfils the same role as the Under-Secretary of State.

I remember Nkozozana Dlamini-Zuma, now Minister for Health, who came to Britain after the Soweto disturbance to complete her medical training. When I was at York university, a fellow student in the centre for southern African studies was Alex Erwin, who is now deputy Finance Minister.

Our country and South Africa have a unique opportunity to forge close links built on this mutual understanding and friendship. It is in the interest of our country as much as of South Africa to ensure that country's economy develops successfully and vibrantly to the benefit of all people in South Africa. That could also act as a catalyst for development throughout Africa.

Of all the continents, Africa has the furthest to go in terms of development. It is the continent of greatest poverty, where more people become poor in real terms every year. It is important to aid the southern African economy to grow in every way that we can, so that it may act as a catalyst and powerhouse for development throughout Africa.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Is my hon. Friend aware that good relationships with South Africa are essential for certain British industries? In engineering, for example, some additives to steel that make it suitable for particular purposes are found principally in South Africa and Namibia. It is in our economic interests that the relationships to which my hon. Friend referred are fostered.

Mr. Bayley: No, I did not know that—but as southern Africa is so mineral-rich, I wholly accept my hon. Friend's point, which emphasises my argument.

I was one of several hon. Members present in the Chamber who were fortunate to be asked last April by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to visit South Africa as election observers. On the final day that the votes were counted, there were not enough tickets for observers, so to do something useful I spent the day finding out about health care in South Africa, which is an interest of mine in terms of domestic policy.

I visited the Alexandra health centre in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg and Baragwaneth hospital, which serves Soweto. The doctors at Alexandra said that as there had been no census of black people in South Africa, they had undertaken a survey of social conditions. They identified 36 per cent. unemployment and 37 per cent. homelessness, with people living in self-built shacks.

Only 19 per cent. of Alexandra's population had running water in their homes and only 12 per cent. had toilets. Fewer than one person in 10 out of a population of hundreds of thousands was over the age of 40. That emphasises that although political apartheid has gone, the legacy of apartheid still runs deep. We have humanitarian obligations to address that legacy and those inequalities.

I was told at Baragwaneth hospital that the World Bank had reported that 53 per cent. of all children aged two to four in South Africa have stunted growth because of malnutrition. South Africa has half a million people infected with HIV, and another 500 cases are reported each day. It is expected that in 15 years, between 18 per cent. and 24 per cent. of South Africa's population will be infected.

If a rich and developed country such as Britain faced that burden of disease, its economic development, viability and social stability would be tremendously compromised and threatened. When a poorer country such as South Africa is under such a burden, although we wish it well, that places many rocks on the path to its economic development.

I agree with the Minister that South Africa's development will need investment and trade as well as aid. Investment and trade will be driven by market forces. I urge the Minister to guarantee that the Government will the UK aid for South Africa's reconstruction to further the principles of social justice and erase the legacy of apartheid. That would be wholly consistent with the Government priority of targeting aid at the poor—since the poor were the victims of apartheid.

Mr. Baldry: I have no difficulty giving the hon. Gentleman that undertaking.

Mr. Bayley: I am delighted to hear that, and I will make one further bid.

The problems of social disadvantage in South Africa will be dealt with largely by local authorities rather than the national Government. The Minister mentioned the elections in October. The Local Government International Bureau says that a number of British local authorities have expressed interest in playing a part in assisting the development of South African social policy through technical co-operation.

The local authority technical link scheme for eastern Europe could perhaps provide a model for the exchange or provision of expertise. That scheme was recently evaluated, and although improvements were proposed, it was found generally to provide good value for money. Perhaps the Minister will reflect on whether a similar scheme could be launched for southern Africa as part of Britain's development programme.

6.7 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), who was in South Africa during the course of the elections as a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association outbound delegation.

I join the general felicitations for South Africa's return to the Commonwealth which gives rise to today's debate. Tonight in the Palace of Westminster, for the first time since 1961, we have the presence of a member of South Africa's national Parliament as a delegate to the 44th Westminster parliamentary seminar, co-hosted by the UK branch and international secretariat of the CPA, of which I have the honour to be chairman of the executive committee. It is a nice coincidence that both occasions are running in parallel tonight.

Some years ago, we resolved to reach out beyond the CPA's natural remit to countries outside the Commonwealth, because we felt it appropriate, where there was a historical connection, to draw them back in by whatever means. The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) and I served for a number of years on the international executive committee, and worked together to that end in respect of South Africa.

[Mr. Colin Shepherd]

One of my first pleasures on assuming the office that I continue to hold was to lead a mission to South Africa in November 1993. It was the exciting time when the transitional constitution was being finally drafted. The purpose was to restate the invitation of Commonwealth parliamentarians to return to—I must be careful these days—the brotherhood of the Commonwealth. We must be politically correct.

During the mission, we talked to all the leaderships of the political parties that would have Members of Parliament. We talked to all the agencies that would be involved in running elections. We talked also to those in the voluntary sector—the Churches, for example. We found what I can only describe as a hunger for shared experience. As parliamentarians, we have our experience to share.

The people to whom we talked were interested in the workings of elections. How were voters to be educated? How was the electoral mechanism to operate? Hovering on the scene was wonderment at what would happen after the forthcoming election. There was no doubt among those to whom we talked that the election would take place, but they were interested in what would happen after that. As soon as the election took place, we restated our invitation to South Africa to engage in Commonwealth parliamentary affairs.

It was a great pleasure to have observers at the African regional conference in May 1994 at Nairobi in the shape of two Clerks of the South African Parliament. In September, the two Houses of the National Assembly passed resolutions to join the CPA. We had for the first time, under the leadership of Senator Govan Mbeki, a full delegation at the plenary conference at Alberta. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister enjoyed the bilateral meetings that he had with that delegation, as I did, under the senator's remarkable leadershi.

Many tributes have been paid to personalities during the debate, and it is singular that Senator Mbeki has not been mentioned so far. I want to rectify the omission.

He is a magnificent gentleman who spent 25 years incarcerated on Robben island. He has a serenity and tranquillity about him the like of which I have never come across before, anywhere. I asked him how he survived 25 years of incarceration without becoming bitter, and how he had developed such inner strength. He replied, "Well, I realised that there was another way. I spent my time in prison teaching the incoming youngsters that there was another way." The transitional process reflects the fruits of Senator Mbeki's work, along with that of Nelson Mandela, who also has inner tranquillity and the awareness that there is another way. That is why we now have stability.

One of the common threads of the CPA's discussions is the need to shorten the learning curve of parliamentary expertise. The young lady who escorted me through the parliamentary buildings at Cape Town in August was, as it were, a pointer. She was of indian extraction. I asked how she found things. She replied, "It is extraordinary. I passed here for 20 years as a schoolgirl and student, and it meant nothing to me. Now I am part of it. It is me." She has been engaged in the learning curve. She realised how much there was to learn about working the institution. That common thread has come through all my subsequent discussions.

In the remarks of my hon. Friend the Minister, and implicit in his brief, is the recognition that priority must be given to the concept of good governance. That has already been said about local government. Good governance is not only the good administration of government: it also involves the understanding of parliamentarians of those who have been elected to various institutions. We can make a contribution as parliamentarians. When I talk about parliamentarians, I mean the broadest spectrum of membership of the CPA.

We believe in this place that we have much to offer, but we are not alone. There is a tremendous wealth of experience among 11,000 parliamentary Members from all forms and structures of democracy in the Commonwealth. The strength of the CPA is that we can draw together the key people who are needed to match a workshop to the needs of the moment and the agenda for it. It is a unique and powerful asset.

In South Africa, there is a National Assembly with two Houses. There are also nine provincial Parliaments. Most of the Members of the provincial Parliaments have never sat before in any instrument of government, or instrument of legislation. That is where one of our great tasks lies.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to think about investing some of his aid budget, in conjunction with Baroness Chalker as Minister with responsibilities for overseas development, in parliamentary workshops. A multiplicity of workshops is required within the terms of a good-value-for-money operation. It will not be good enough to set up one workshop and leave. I envisage a programme that will continue over many years. Constant attention must be given to meeting the need.

We must pull together as well the political and parliamentary expertise in surrounding countries, all of which are welcoming the concept of seminars or workshops. I prefer in this context to talk about workshops. We shall be setting up one in Botswana in May-June. We set up one recently in Malawi. One was established recently in Lesotho.

We must maintain the pressure on a wider basis, so that parliamentarians get to know one another, talk to one another and understand and share experiences. Shared experience will lead to a set of circumstances that stops electioneering on the basis of unnaturally heightened expectations. Electioneering must be based on deliverable promises and an understanding of how to deliver those promises. These understandings are so important if there is to be sustained credibility in the concept of democratic elections and government.

Mr. Baldry: If my hon. Friend has ideas that he would like to bring forward, it goes without saying that my right hon. Friend Baroness Chalker and I would give them constructive consideration.

Mr. Shepherd: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. Having drawn his intervention, I shall move on to my final remarks.

To put on a different hat, we are doing our bit in generating trade between the United Kingdom and South Africa. One of the greatest pleasures that I have had as Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Catering was to say on the day after South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth, "Let there be South African wines for sale in the Dining Room." The House is doing its bit.

6.19 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I join all hon. Members in welcoming South Africa back to the Commonwealth, and have very much enjoyed the contributions to the debate. I have one small interest to declare, in that I spent a lot of time in South Africa in the 1980s. I was arrested by the South African police.

Perhaps, unlike the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), who is no longer in his place, I saw a different side to South Africa on my visits down there. I wrote a book—now long remaindered and forgotten—about the black trade union movement, "Black workers, their unions and the struggle for freedom in South Africa". If any hon. Member really cannot fall asleep tonight, I would be happy to provide a copy.

I welcome the Bill and pay tribute—many tributes have been paid this afternoon—to the people who have not been mentioned: those in the black trade union movement in South Africa, who, in the 1970s and 1980s, were the school of democracy, out of which the black majority in South Africa grew into a democratic maturity, which enabled them, with the help of the ANC and of overseas support, to form a movement of ideas and pressures such that it obliged President de Klerk—I salute his recognition of what was happening—to recognise reality.

The Minister referred to the help for entrepreneurs that the Government are providing. I would like him in his closing remarks to address the question of what help he will be providing the trade union movement in South Africa, via the Trades Union Congress and the Commonwealth Trades Union Council, which is linked to the Commonwealth Institute.

I know that our ambassador in South Africa has a discretionary fund of some £50,000, which is used to help the several million trade unionists, and the Overseas Development Administration as a whole provides a little under £200,000 for trade union help throughout the entire world. I compare that with the Netherlands, a much smaller country than Britain, which provides some £6 million for that kind of work. The United Kingdom currently gives the smallest help of any industrial country supporting the trade union movement in South Africa. I draw the House's attention to that singular lapse in Government policy towards South Africa.

During the 1970s, Britain had a good record. The British consular department and British diplomats in South Africa were extremely helpful to the burgeoning black independent trade union movement. That was snuffed out dramatically in the 1980s, when the British embassy and British official offices in South Africa became no-go areas for the black trade union movement, at a time when other major countries, such as the United States, Germany, Sweden—even Japan—were giving help and support to the independent black trade union movement in South Africa.

American companies—the Minister referred to the role of British business—responded to the call of black South Africans by withdrawing from activity in South Africa. BMW and Mercedes, those giant German companies, formally signed legally binding social charter-type agreements with the black trade union movement in South Africa, while British companies, notably BTR and Shell, victimised trade unionists, repressed them, tried to break their unions and fired many thousands of workers after they had gone on strike.

We have turned a page, and that is good, but let this House record simply that the 1980s were a page of shame for British policy towards the South African people. I hope that, in his reply, the Minister might be prepared to pay tribute to the Trades Union Congress and to the Commonwealth Trades Union Congress, to express, perhaps, a word for the unknown trade unionists—if I had time, I would list the many names—who were killed in the struggle to form independent and democratic trade unions in South Africa.

South Africa has managed its return to democracy, and has done so in large part because of the great experience in democratic organisation of the trade union movement. When parliamentary procedures were denied to the black majority, it was in the trade union movement that they could develop the art of argument, compromise and give and take. That black independent trade union movement was the great school of South African democracy.

I hope that we can encourage British companies as they increase their investment in South Africa—and I wish them so to do—to enter into a partnership with the black independent trade union movement in South Africa, because the sphere of economic development, the need for social stability as South Africa tries to handle the problem of the expectations of the mass of its people, is so important for its future harmonious development.

I welcome the Bill. I welcome South Africa's return to the Commonwealth. I rejoice in the fact that I can now go back there freely, and not have to face harassment by the police. I welcome the fact that I can drink South African wine—and wonderful wines they are. I long to take my family on holiday to South Africa, because the air fares will become cheap and the tourist industry will develop.

But the British Government should learn lessons from their mishandling of working people in South Africa. They should step up aid, via the TUC and the Commonwealth Trades Union Council. They should also learn the lessons that, in many other parts of the world, it is the working people, whether in Indonesia or China, who are forming independent unions, which are the schools of democracy for those nations as they seek the path not just to development or economic growth but to a democratic participation in the international comity of nations.

6.28 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I rise to express my sincere support for the Bill. I am sure that it also has the sincere support of my constituents. Although it is a rather narrow Bill, which deals with administrative frameworks, under your generous chairmanship, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the debate has ranged rather more widely.

The important fact, of course, is that legislative frameworks can never create the results for which the legislation was prepared. The result arises from the actions of individuals, many thousands of them, carrying out actions as a result of the legislative changes. As far as our relationship with South Africa is concerned, it is not the changes in the law that will re-create the bonds we had in the past, and those which we hope to build in future, but the personal relationships between those who live in this country and those who live in South Africa itself.

[Mr. Peter Griffiths]

I particularly wish to speak about the schedule, because it makes reference to the armed forces of the Republic of South Africa and also the United Kingdom, and about the relationship between those armed forces when there are reciprocal visits. I suppose that it is unlikely that we will ever again have the situation that arose in the second world war, when hundreds of thousands of British service men entered Cape Town on their way to the battle fronts in the far east and the middle east.

My own father was one of those who went into that city, and he was struck by the amazing welcome given to service men by ordinary families in South Africa at that time. We shall never have that scale of interchange of service personnel again.

I represent Portsmouth, which is a great naval base. In that city are those who have family links with South Africa, and they have always prayed for the coming of the situation that we have today, when they can feel free and happy in their associations with that country. They can once again see it as a friendly nation and a good place for their family to live.

I hope that the legislation will facilitate the interchange of naval forces between the United Kingdom and the Republic of South Africa. In the past, there were many links between the two navies; many of my constituents who have retired from the naval service remember the days when they exercised with the South African navy in the south Atlantic from the Simonstown naval base. Many of them say that they were some of the best days they remember, and that it would be marvellous if we could return to such an association.

I trust that young sailors from South Africa will come to our great ports, such as Portsmouth, for training in naval skills. We can offer that to many countries, but on this occasion specifically to South Africa.

I hope that once again our vessels will be sailing to the south Atlantic, to Simonstown, because there is a great security need for a joint naval presence in that part of the world. This afternoon is no time to refer to the conflict in the south Atlantic, when South Africa was not part of the Commonwealth. What a difference it would have made had we had naval facilities then that could have been utilised for the assistance of our armed forces.

The indication in the Bill that we will be welcoming to the armed forces of South Africa as members of Commonwealth visiting forces here will not only mean that we shall welcome them to the United Kingdom but that we shall ensure that our armed forces are represented at joint exercises in South Africa and the south Atlantic.

The Bill is one more step towards the rebuilding of the traditional family friendship which exists between all people in Britain and all the races in South Africa.

6.31 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) is right to draw attention to the family relationship—so many of us have family in South Africa, my own from the time of the Boer war; I have a cousin who must be the only Myfanwy Roberts in South Africa—and the reservoir of good will which has resulted from the way in which our history has grown up.

It is a great pleasure to follow so many distinguished hon. Members who have spoken with great personal knowledge of South Africa during the past decades, and a joyful surprise to be involved in a debate on South Africa where I am not crossing swords with the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). I recall that he had a hot line to the old regime and I am glad that he is now reconciled to the new regime—

"even the ranks of Tuscany".

It is grand that, if there is such wonderful evidence of reconciliation in South Africa, the least we can do in the House is to share some of that same reconciliation. I recall a remarkable Afrikaner whom I met recently who told me that in South Africa they talked about the liberation of the black man, but that his experience as an Afrikaner and a white man was that it was he who was now liberated in his own country. Therefore, a mutual sense of liberation is part of the prospects, the encouragement, for the new South Africa.

All who have spoken have drawn attention to the fact that this is a technical Bill, but it gives us one of those rare opportunities to debate South Africa. Like many hon. Members I am genuinely excited about the developments in South Africa—

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive".

I was a diplomat in 1962 when South Africa left the Commonwealth. The in joke at the time was that the South African representative had said with surprise that so much would South Africa welcome members from the Commonwealth, black and yellow members of the Commonwealth, that they would build a special hotel for them. That was perhaps the last straw which preceded the departure of South Africa from the Commonwealth.

There then followed almost three decades of missed opportunities, political short-sightedness and oppression of some of the brightest and best people in South Africa. The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) and others have drawn attention to that reconciliation, that forgiveness, which is now so much part of the black experience in South Africa. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who has just left the Chamber, drew attention to the importance of the trade unions in South Africa for education, maturity of approach and moderation.

I want to pay tribute to another group in South Africa whose praises are not sung so much but who so helped to bridge the divide. Future historians will ask why, despite the Bantu Education Act and the oppression of the black man over those decades, when South Africa became liberated there were so many black people with the political maturity to move into positions of responsibility. That is partly due to the trade union movement, to which I pay tribute, but also to the churches which allowed black people to move as far as their talents would take them. One thinks of Archbishop Tutu, not only a wonderful man but a symbol of what churches were doing. Dr. Beyers Naudé of the South African Council of Churches and the Reverend Frank Chikane are just two of the people who might feel rather like the first stage of a rocket; they have played their role and can now return to the church.

In the middle and late 1980s, many white South Africans were reading Alistair Horne's book "Algeria. The Savage War of Peace" and wondering whether white people in South Africa would be fleeing the country with only a flimsy piece of luggage as many of the whites in Algeria had done. Having visited the country more than

20 times during the past years, in my judgment one of the fundamental reasons why that did not happen was the influence of the church and the fact that there were grand Christians on both side of what might have been a barricade. That gave an education to both sides. It allowed people to obtain a moderate view and training in administration. The reconciling role of the Church has been fundamental in recent South African history.

I had the privilege to speak on South Africa for the Opposition for nine years. I recall my first visit to South Africa in the early 1980s. I telephoned the man who was then the number two at the South African embassy because I did not want to waste money on my air fair only to be banned on arrival in Johannesburg. That man said that he would not ban me. It is again a happy symbol that that man is now the director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in South Africa—another example of that happy reconciling process in South Africa.

Concurrently, I became senior vice-president of the Association of West European Parliamentarians for Action Against Apartheid—AWEPAA—which tried to show, even in the darkest days when the army was in the townships and despair was all around, that there was a progressive view in Britain and Europe in respect of the South African situation.

There was also the great role of the Commonwealth. Many in South Africa knew that there were Europeans on their side, but they also knew that the Commonwealth, the reconciling, multi-racial, unique Commonwealth—this is the essential part of the Bill—was fighting their corner.

No one has mentioned, for example, the role of Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the current Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. I understand that he wrote a substantial part of the seminal report of the Eminent Persons Group, produced in 1986—or acted as scribe—and, through considerable personal diplomacy in the region, has helped to build bridges to the new South Africa.

It should be borne in mind that the sub-region is essentially a Commonwealth region: virtually all the countries included in it belong to the Commonwealth. The exceptions are Mozambique—which currently has what that same Secretary-General calls a cousinly relationship with the Commonwealth, whatever that may be, and wants to join—and Angola. The Commonwealth has played, is playing and will continue to play a major role. It is thus hardly surprising that, even in the darkest days, everyone said that once fundamental change had taken place in South Africa one of the first things that they wanted to do was rejoin the Commonwealth. The Bill adds some of the nuts and bolts.

It could all have gone very wrong; but if we believe in miracles in politics, here indeed was a miracle. If there is still scope for joy in politics, here was joy on all sides. A number of us attended the elections last April. I was in Port Elizabeth, and for me the great symbolic time was the moment when I saw a queue of people in the sunshine waiting to vote. The white employer stood with the black servant; black, white, white and black all stood patiently in line—and each vote had the same value. For me, that was part of the great symbolism of reconciliation.

I remain confident about the future. I shall not speak at length about the role of the Commonwealth, because the hon. Member for Hereford—a distinguished former chairman of our United Kingdom Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and now the international president—has already said a good deal about it. We know, however, that both the international CPA, which welcomed South Africa back to the family at Banff in October—no legislation was necessary for that return—and our national CPA, along with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, have played a major role.

What can we in the United Kingdom do now to help the process? We can, for instance, try to ensure that South Africa does not slip off the screen; despite all the past interest in Namibia, it—alas—has almost done that. We can try to ensure that South Africa remains high on the international agenda.

Training has been mentioned. Even before the fundamental change in South Africa, the Commonwealth commissioned a report on human resources in the new South Africa: that was an important step. Moreover, training can work both ways: just as we can train South Africa's army, police, educationists and provincial government, South Africa can come and train us, helping to teach us how to play cricket and rugby.

The United Kingdom can play a unique role as an advocate for South Africa in the various international forums of which we are part. The UK, indeed, has a unique role in the world because of our membership of so many of those forums.

Let me say a little about the European Union and the Lomé convention. This is probably the main current issue. Much has been said about aid, but it is a relatively small though valuable part of the equation. What South Africa wants most is access to an open European market. Along with those of our European Union partners who do not see the Union as a closed circle, we should act as an advocate for South Africa and others, recognising that in fighting for South Africa's cause we are fighting the cause of the region. South Africa is the region's main motor: in energy matters, for instance, ESKOM has played and will play a major part.

South Africa has recently sought what is described as "alignment" of its future relations with the European Union through the Lomé convention. The word "alignment" has been used because the South Africans recognise, realistically, that they cannot hope to become full members of the Lomé convention framework: as many hon. Members have pointed out, South Africa is unique in belonging to both the first world and the third world, and the two are very close together there.

What interests South Africa most are the trade provisions relating to market access, cumulation and the right to tender for European development fund projects. The European Commission, however, has ruled out the prospect of the Lomé trade provisions being applied to South Africa. It proposes a two-tier approach—effectively an agreement between the European Union and South Africa on trade and co-operation and a protocol to the Lomé convention, covering the terms and conditions of the South African accession to the convention.

The Commission argues that there would otherwise be trade diversion, that South Africa's position would be in breach of the general agreement on tariffs and trade and that a number of GATT countries would object to it. Which are those countries? For example, given its record, the United States is hardly likely to take the blame for the blocking of South Africa's access to Lomé.

If South Africa cannot diversify and expand its export base, it will be unable to restructure its economy and to bring about the necessary social and economic change.

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

That is likely to endanger the democratic transition which has taken place as people see their living standards falling as the appalling legacy of apartheid takes its toll. That is the challenge to us in the United Kingdom, and to the European Union. After all those brave words—all those resolutions in the 1970s and 1980s—when it comes to the hard fact of market access, will we allow South African goods to enter our market? If we do not, we shall certainly endanger the democratic process.

We can hold as many seminars and workshops on good governance as we like—of course those are important—but if the economic substructure fails, the great South African experiment will fail. That is the challenge that I present to the Minister in respect of our country, as an advocate for the new South Africa.

I believe that it is in the United Kingdom's national interests to act as such an advocate—not only because of our great historical ties, the large number of British people who live in South Africa and our investments there, but for sheer human and moral reasons: because of the way in which we have acted in the past, colluding with the apartheid regime in some ways. Along, I am sure, with the rest of the House, I welcome South Africa unreservedly as an old friend—a prodigal who now returns. The Commonwealth has played a vital and historic role in the past, particularly in the period of transition; I believe that it is now ready to play, at every level, an important and unique role that no other institution can perform.

6.49 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Tribute has rightly been paid to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy for their practical help during the year or so of South Africa's transition. Tribute has also rightly been paid to individuals and institutions which have helped in the fight against white supremacy over the past 20 to 30 years. Many of those people have been named.

I agree with the tributes that have been paid to the South African Council of Churches and especially to Beyers Naudé and his successors. Anyone who had the opportunity to listen to him during the years when he was under a banning order and one normally had to meet him in a church, would have been impressed by the way that one of the leading theologians and seminarians provided a spark which was equivalent to that provided by the young man who returned to South Africa to refuse to wear his army uniform.

When one sees the brightest and best willing not only to speak up but to sacrifice their future position and reputation for what they believe to be right, one appreciates the struggles carried out not only by the prominent examples but, as the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said, by the countless numbers of people who tried to work in the trade union movement and in other civic organisations.

In looking forward I hope that people will support the work that will lead to local elections. I have a specific association with the Educational Trust for Civic Responsibility in South Africa. One of its leading lights is Mildred Neville, who for many years worked with the Catholic Institute for International Relations providing unbiased briefings and information links with people in this country.

One of the people who worked with Mildred Neville, Tim Sheehy, managed to return to South Africa to work in connection with the European Community aid effort, having had various other roles in the South African Development Co-ordination Conference and in Zimbabwe.

When I was elected to the House nineteen and a half years ago, the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Baroness Thatcher, asked me what I was interested in and I said that I was interested in trying to persuade the white supremacists in South Africa and in the Conservative party that they were morally wrong and militarily losers. The positive side was to say that others could benefit from the democracy and the flexible economic system that we have built, which we protect, and from which we benefit. We have one person, one vote, and British Governments do not control as much of the economy as, sadly, the South African Government did.

The schedule deals with visiting forces. Some of the actions by South African Government forces during the years of apartheid were disgraceful and should have been more widely condemned. I draw the attention of foreign Governments to what I think are called the Whitehall guidelines, which are available in the Library. The protocol department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office took the opportunity to express to embassies and high commissions assurances that they would receive the highest consideration. They were also told, "By the way, do not in this country go in for the bully-boy tactics that you use in other countries."

Some of the bombings, assassinations and intimidation were carried out by agents of BOSS, the Bureau of State Security. South Africa was not the only country guilty of such actions but it was more guilty more often, and the Government should have exerted more pressure to eliminate such activity.

Father Trevor Huddleston has been mentioned. Not just in this country but in Africa, people generally owe him a great deal. I link with Father Huddleston the name of Mrs. Jill Thompson who has worked with him over most of the past 30 years. I hope that Father Huddleston will enjoy his time in South Africa. What a blessing it is that he has lived to see his life's work reach a successful culmination. He was helped by the late Tony Rampton and Mrs. Rampton. People like that, prophets who preach often to an apparent wilderness, need support. I hope that many whose names have not been mentioned will be able to share in the tributes that have been paid by hon. Members.

Another clergyman who deserves recognition is Bishop Timothy Bavin, the Bishop of Portsmouth. He gave up his position in South Africa so that Desmond Tutu could rise in the Church and carry on his work more prominently. I hope that Bishop Timothy Bavin will accept the congratulations of hon. Members. They are well deserved.

People have faced many difficulties, some of them arising from ignorance in the general community. Many young people in this country have been sensitised to world affairs by some of the struggles against apartheid. I fear that the Government are making a mistake in reducing funding to the Council for Education in World Citizenship. Work such as that carried out by the council, which provides material encouragement and holds conferences for children in schools throughout the

country, has helped to make people more aware that people in other countries cannot take for granted that which we in Britain take for granted.

I plead with the Government to reconsider their decision to cut severely the funding for the CEWC because that would be a mistake. It is even more of a mistake than the severe cutting of funds for the Commonwealth Institute, although that institute brings home to children what it is like to grow up in the world and not just in one part of it.

My final point is about family and personal connections. In this short debate and in others over the years, it has been quite clear that hon. Members have benefited from the opportunity to visit South Africa and the front-line states. It is a mistake to believe that we can be world citizens without travelling. One way or another we should add to the opportunities to go on Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegations. We should also take the opportunities that are occasionally offered by airlines or by other countries. We should be able to decide for ourselves whether to go on visits.

Most of my visits to Africa as an individual have been very productive because I have been able to move around and meet, as it were, non-legal people—those who work in townships or even in the more affluent suburbs of Johannesburg. One can also meet people in churches and sometimes in prison. Such opportunities are valuable. We cannot do our job properly in encouraging the Government or in speaking up as British Members of Parliament in other countries if we cannot travel with reasonable independence.

Even if the cost means cutting the number of Members of Parliament, we should provide a reasonable travel allowance to be used at one's own discretion. Those who use it for freeloading and holidays would be discovered, but those who would use it for detailed investigative work of the kind that I have mentioned deserve the opportunity to do that.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment; read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Broadcasting of the House

6.58 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That this House approves the First Report of the Select Committee on Broadcasting of Session 1993-94, House of Commons Paper No. 112, on Developing the Parliamentary Broadcasting Archives.

I also move the motion in my role as Chairman of the Select Committee on Broadcasting. By way of background to the debate, perhaps I should explain that the master videotapes of all proceedings in the Chambers of both Houses, and of those Committee proceedings that are chosen for recording by the broadcasters, are transferred to the Parliamentary Recording Unit, which is located in the television control room complex at 7 Millbank. The tapes are retained by the PRU until the end of the Session following their date of origination, after which they are transferred to the National Film Archive, which is responsible for ensuring that the tapes are catalogued and stored in properly controlled conditions, in return for which it receives an annual management fee from Parliament. A substantial historical library is being built up.

Most right hon. and hon. Members will be aware of the existence of the broadcasting archives through the tapes of their speeches which they order from the PRU—mostly, I assume, for their personal use—but there is also a small and growing interest from individuals and organisations outside the House. They are making use of archive material for a range of purposes, some educational, some charitable and some avowedly commercial. Many of those uses were not and, indeed, could not have been anticipated when the original rules governing the use of archive material were drawn up. Our report, therefore, represents a modest and—with one possible exception that I will come to later—uncontroversial attempt to bring those rules up to date.

The Committee's 16 recommendations are set out fully in the report, so I will do no more than refer briefly to some of the more important ones. The Committee was especially keen to encourage the use of archive material for educational purposes, both

"as a means of spreading knowledge of the Parliamentary system of government and as a vehicle for portraying some of the less glamorous but important aspects of the House's work".

This debate might come under that heading. It is certainly not glamorous or, I hope, controversial, although it has some importance.

The report therefore endorses the continuation of the existing concessionary rate for tapes purchased for educational purposes, gives the Supervisor of Parliamentary Broadcasting the lead role in regulating educational videos featuring parliamentary archive material, and accepts in principle the idea of a loans system, whereby video material could be hired by schools and other educational establishments for a small handling charge.

As I explained earlier, all non-broadcasting uses of archive material are governed by a set of guidelines, and those are published in an appendix to the report. Essentially, they are declaratory in form and, accordingly, considerable scope exists for their interpretation in specific cases—there is scope for judgment. The

[Mr. Tony Newton]

Committee took the view that, as the permanent televising of the House's proceedings was firmly established, it was sensible to adopt a somewhat less restrictive approach to the application of the guidelines. As the report puts it:

"This implies a presumption that a particular use of archive material . . . ought to be permitted unless there is a compelling reason why it should not be".

In that context, of particular relevance is the use of videos for campaigning purposes, where the Committee thought it increasingly impractical to seek to uphold a rigid notion of political balance.

The important point to emphasise, however, is that the Committee is not recommending a complete free-for-all. Important safeguards will remain in the form of a requirement on the part of video producers to uphold the dignity of the House and the rights of hon. Members. That does not mean that individual Members can exercise a veto over the use of videos featuring extracts from their speeches, but they will be protected against, for example, editing techniques that distort their speeches or that make them appear to express views which they do not hold.

In addition, the Supervisor of Parliamentary Broadcasting exercises a monitoring role and has the right, where she thinks it appropriate, to preview any video that has been the subject of an application to use archive footage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): One of the disgraceful aspects of American electioneering and, in effect, television party political broadcasts is the practice of picking up a sentence uttered once by a potential opponent and running it over and over again. We cannot do that in this country. I would be grateful to know whether a political party could take an expression by, say, the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition and use it in a party political broadcast. Will there be any controls or regulations to safeguard against that?

Mr. Newton: If my hon. Friend will bear with me for a while, I am coming to the specific question of party political broadcasts, which is the area of controversy to which I referred earlier, and where the position is different from what I have just described.

There is one other important way in which the House's rights are protected. In the case of videos produced for commercial gain, a royalty can be levied following discussions between the supervisor and the producers. That provision has already been invoked in a couple of cases, but I would not encourage the House to look to this as a source of large windfall revenues. The market for such material remains relatively small, but it is right that the House should derive some return from whatever profits are earned.

I referred earlier to one possibly contentious recommendation in the report—this brings me to the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). It relates to the use of parliamentary archive material in party political and election broadcasts. Hitherto, that has not been permitted, but the Committee concluded, after some considerable discussion, that that was no longer a tenable position, especially in view of the proposed more liberal approach to the use of videos for non-broadcasting purposes. The report therefore recommends that clean feed extracts—the pictures—may be used in party political and election broadcasts, but with two important provisos.

Those are that the material in question should be taken from a speech or other contribution by a member of the party responsible for making the broadcast, and that it should be included only with his or her permission. That would allow, for example, any of the parties to feature extracts from a parliamentary speech by their leader, but it would not be possible to show a clip featuring a political opponent. I think that that answers the principal thrust of my hon. Friend's concern, which I share.

Some Committee members wanted to go much further than that by removing all restrictions on the use of archive material in party political broadcasts and election broadcasts—which is what my hon. Fried would fear—but, as the House will learn from the minutes of proceedings, an amendment to that effect was defeated on the acting Chairman's casting vote. I was unable to be present at the sitting. If I had been present, there would not have been a need for a casting vote. The matter was settled in that way. I think that that was the right approach.

Perhaps I could briefly mention one other recommendation—that the terms of the licence granted by the Speaker to Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Ltd.—known as PARBUL—should be amended to make it clear that the right to exploit, or to permit others to exploit, the signals for non-broadcasting purposes remain with Parliament from the date of the origination of the material. If the House approves the report tonight, the change will probably be incorporated in the new licence, which will need to be issued when the current one expires in July 1996.

The report makes a number of useful, although quite modest, recommendations that should encourage the more widespread availability and use of the recorded proceedings of the House, but without permitting what many of us would regard as their abuse, which my hon. Friend was concerned about. I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members share that objective, and I therefore commend the report to the House.

7.8 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): As the Leader of the House said, the debate is perhaps non-controversial and less glamorous than others, but it is important—slightly more so than some people would imagine simply from reading the title on the Order Paper. It is about how we present our proceedings and how Parliament is interpreted and understood not only now, but well into the next century. New techniques are being used that have moved on a long way from pen and ink and newspaper reporting, and *Hansard*.

Some of us may recall the speech of the Secretary of State for Employment on back to basics and on fighting the "new British disease" of cynicism about institutions. It was delivered on 14 January last year at the annual dinner held by the president of the Conservative Way Forward group. He opened by saying that he would talk about one of the greatest threats that ever confronted the British nation. After seven pages of his speech he concluded by saying:

"Parliament was, I think, ill advised to let in the TV cameras in."

I do not think that we can be held totally responsible for the undermining of our institutions such as the monarchy, the Church and Parliament simply because the television cameras have been allowed in here. I welcomed and was glad about that decision. We need to move with the times, but we also need to shape the destiny of the way in which we are presented in televisual terms. I do not accept the melodramatic and pessimistic view of the presentation of our work held by the current Secretary of State for Employment.

As the Committee suggests and as the Leader of the House said, we need to be a little bit wary. Paragraph 62 of the report, under the heading "The Editorial Guidelines", states:

"This sort of material will be shown to audiences many of whom will be of an impressionable age."

I suggest that our debates are not a matter for the British Board of Film Classification. It is not for that body to decide whether our debates should be rated as 18, 15, or only to be watched with parental guidance. I do not think that parliamentary speeches could terrify our children.

I welcome the report's recommendations. There needs to be a record—a video record—to catch living history. In this short debate, we should support and encourage the wider use of the parliamentary broadcasting archives for two reasons: first, to enhance the understanding of our parliamentary democracy and increase awareness of its complexity; and, secondly, to earn revenue from our proceedings. There is nothing wrong with earning a return by allowing the material to be used. That implies that we hold the copyright for that material here. The idea that a video of parliamentary proceedings will be damaging does not reflect the fact that there has been a real change in technology with which we are obliged to keep pace. As the report says, we can enhance revenues, but that should be done without reductions in quality.

There is space to expand the scope and use of the archive, not only by Members of Parliament but to disseminate as widely as possible information about the working of the Chamber and the House of Commons. There are questions of royalties and copyrights and respect for the integrity of debate. But I hope that the House can call together the authorities of the House, the Library with its publicity role, the Public Information Office and the Parliamentary Recording Unit to ensure that we have the means to facilitate access to our material as widely as possible.

There is a shift towards seeing the video of our proceedings as a substitute for *Hansard*. Newspapers were first allocated seats in the Public Gallery in 1803. Two characters recorded events here. William Cobbett wrote for *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* and wrote brief summaries for the first *Hansard*. He sold his interest to Thomas Curzon Hansard and, since then, we have had an official report called *Hansard*.

One of my great heroes, Charles Dickens, sat in the Gallery noting down our events. In 1831, he was helping with the task of recording debates on the first reform Bill. He took his place as a Gallery reporter working into the night. He commented that the work involved more stenography than creativity. In March 1832, he became a parliamentary reporter for a newspaper called, perhaps surprisingly now, *True Sun*. He continued to work for the newspaper called *Mirror of Parliament*. While trying to build up and organise an official parliamentary record, he gained recognition as the most rapid, accurate and trustworthy reporter. He realised that it was about not just transcription but narration and interpretation. He said that objective dryness sometimes needed local colour.

Interestingly, he moved out of the Gallery to go round the constituencies. At that time, Members of Parliament realised that they could give speeches on soap boxes around the country. There are not many hon. Members here tonight, but tomorrow they will be in their constituencies visiting local events. There was a sense in which the debate moved outside Parliament occasionally. There still needs to be a focus on what happens here. Even now, just as in Dickens's day, there is a danger that the action is seen as "out there" and that what happens in the Chamber is simply the objective dryness.

During the war, I believe that Penguin published three volumes of reports from *Hansard*, covering the years 1939 to 1944. Just before my time, extracts of debates on the Falklands war were published in order to give people a better understanding of the debates. The Penguin publication was before the days when Parliament was even broadcast on radio, never mind on television.

In recent years, press coverage of our proceedings has diminished substantially. Between 1933 and 1988, parliamentary debates received an average of between 400 and 800 lines of coverage in *The Times* and 300 to 700 lines in *The Guardian*. By 1992, coverage had declined to fewer than 100 lines in each newspaper. There used to be separate pages in the main broadsheets. There used to be a page called "The Day in Politics". It has now shifted to "Policy and Politics". Political commentary, sketches and reports of other events around the country have replaced what goes on in the House. In Charles Dickens's terms, there is stronger emphasis on local colour.

At the same time as the decline in parliamentary reporting, there has been a sharp increase in the cost of *Hansard*. A daily part cost 12p in 1970 and 40p in 1979, and now costs £7.50. That is a tenfold increase over 20 years. Because of the televising of Parliament, newspapers no longer feel that they have a duty to report our proceedings. There is a view that those who are really interested can catch Parliament on television.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Lord President said that there could be a lower cost for this material for educational institutions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there should be a far lower rate for *Hansard*? If we cannot have a lower cost for everyone, there should be a lower cost for libraries, schools and education researchers. To give those people access to *Hansard* shortly after it has been produced is far better than waiting until they might buy an annual CD-ROM.

Mr. Battle: We should let as many people as possible have access to what is said here. If it is not reported in the newspapers and is not covered fully on television, we should try to ensure that the information is available. It might help if we advertised and produced the information in a format that people would find attractive. In that way we could sell more copies. It should not be run at a loss. The cost could be recouped by pushing the availability through education establishments and, to go further, to local groups, pensioner clubs, history clubs and even local groups that meet for tea and coffee. In that way more people would find out for themselves what is going on.

The clips on television reduce our proceedings to Question Time, if not Prime Minister's Question Time. We see a spat of sound and fury. When I glance at the

[Mr. Battle]

news it strikes me that the way in which the images are presented on television creates an impression of the Saturday night programme called "Gladiators" which my children love and I abhor. We seem to be at odds with one another, swinging down to assault each other and then swinging back to the safety of a perch. I do not think that that image, with the notion of high drama, competing ideologies, for and against, should be the model—nor is it the model—for most of our proceedings. Of course, we have divisions, but it does not really reflect the nature of our debate.

I sometimes think that television now presents politics as a spectacle and, in order to attract the lights of television, hon. Members might sometimes be tempted—I put it no more strongly than that—to go in for what I would perhaps uncouthly call "political streaking". Streaking always attracts attention at cricket, football or rugby matches, but it does not lead to people taking the House seriously.

In other words, it sometimes seems that television has decided that ordinary debates on the detail of laws and budgets are not exciting enough for viewers and can therefore be bypassed and ignored, or that the Chamber is sometimes empty because there is more excitement outside. It thus becomes harder for Back Benchers of all parties to get any coverage of the detailed arguments that they make on behalf of their constituents and parties. If we could make use of the archive, the complex processes of Parliament could be more fully understood.

In his evidence to the Committee, Mr. St. John Parker, a headmaster, who is concerned with the teaching of general citizenship and other more specific academic studies of politics, said:

"When one brings students of any age to Westminster they cannot believe what they are seeing and hearing, and I say that in a thoroughly respectful way. It is a very disorganised experience they get, and a very ineffectual one. A suitably edited, and I do not mean faked or over-censored, video film can provide a truthful impression and that is badly needed."

I absolutely agree.

Mr. Sutton, the general secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, said in his evidence to the Committee:

"In terms of wanting to teach politics to young people one is concerned to deal with the highly emotive and popular topics of the day because they attract attention but there is also a case for looking at the way in which Parliamentary democracy works, the whole business of the Government and Opposition in action which may not be so much up front as looking at the latest controversial issue looked at by the politicians. Those who are practitioners in the business need to relate closely to what is produced so they get what they want and not what somebody else thinks they want as a marketable product. We are talking about youngsters' experience of Parliament. Most of them, if they watch the television news, will see Parliament but a small selection, a 15 second bite of Parliamentary Question Time or a Ministerial Statement. They will have no concept of the real work of the House for 90 per cent. of its time and it is this we can usefully put across to them by making adequate use of the archives to produce programmes of the kind being talked about."

I hope that that will be the use of the archive that we encourage, and encourage in a practical way. We want the Library, the Public Information Office and broadcasters to use the archive to make material available.

It is fair to say that such a move would not mean a monotone approach. I often think that if people sat in the Gallery, watched our proceedings, went for a quiet cup of coffee and then wrote a short account of what had been said, there would be as many different accounts as there are sketch writers. We should bear that in mind when we see our proceedings on video. In other words, there is not one simple and clear account.

My final comments relate to the over-attraction of putting everything on to video and new technology. We can now get *Hansard* on a CD-ROM that we can attach to our computers and thus call up immediately the most recent speeches made in the Chamber. That might enable us to dispense with the beautiful green bound volumes that some of us collect as a record of our proceedings—it would certainly take up less shelf space—but it is worth recalling that American computer scientists are now warning of the hazards of switching everything on to the new digital medium.

Replacing paper in an electronic record-keeping revolution may, in the long-term, mean losing the records entirely, not least because of the changes in hardware and software. It is possible that none of the information CD records may be intelligible in 50 years' time because we shall have forgotten the technology on which to play them. There may be no machine to access them, and the records may prove irretrievable.

It is worth mentioning that disks themselves are subject to decay, oxidisation and stray magnetic fields and may become unreadable faster than we think. We cannot simply switch to an electronic archive and dispense with *Hansard*. That is not what the debate is about.

I am told that magnetic tape has a five-year lifespan, as do video tape and magnetic disks. Optical disks are conservatively estimated to have a 10-year lifespan. However, they are comparatively short lifespans compared with that of the first printed edition of Shakespeare's 18th sonnet, which has now lasted for well over four and a half centuries. Therefore, we cannot assume that the electronic medium can replace the written word.

As the Minister said, the key issue in the use of the archive must be judgment. Judgment always operates in a context and that context will change as technology changes—and technology moves fast. Yes, we should presume a less restrictive approach, and we should presume that access is permitted, but we should also state clearly that with access come obligations. We do not want to follow the American model mentioned earlier of party political broadcasts and negative advertising with the use of replays and so-called damage videos. That should not be our intention. We should welcome a commitment to the maintenance of a full archive to enhance the dignity and reputation of the House and individual hon. Members.

Most people do not understand our proceedings, and most wonder why the Chamber is sometimes empty. They may not know that there are Standing Committees, Select Committees and Committees on Statutory Instruments upstairs. Most people do not even know what happens at Prime Minister's Question Time. People still ask me why the Prime Minister always says, "I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago."

It would be helpful if useful material was collected from the broadcast archive to explain how we work and if that material was made available across the nation. If the newspapers are not going to do it and if television is

not doing it, we have an obligation to enhance confidence in our parliamentary democracy and foster understanding of our procedures and faith in political organisation in action as expressed in the House.

The report contained a reference to the role of *Hansard* sub-editors. Yes, the *Hansard* office could oversee the new means of communicating our proceedings, but the broadcast archive should not be feared or erased. It should be used in the future to suggest that, although our way of operating may not be perfect and should be updated in time, it is a much better method than is available in many other parts of the world. That might encourage people to have more faith in our parliamentary democracy and support its institutions.

7.27 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I read with some interest the first report of the Broadcasting Committee. As a relatively new member of the Committee, I found it a dry document but with some interesting passages. I knew that I was going to enjoy reading it when I saw the list of witnesses and found people whom I have never met but who have marvellous names such as Mr. Tune from Newsflash broadcasting consultants and, from the Public Information Office, a duo called Dr. Pond and Mrs. Weeds who, I am sure, gave wonderful evidence.

I whole-heartedly support the commitment in the report to the maintenance of a full broadcasting archive. The report recognises the need to exploit this important resource and explore its potential for being opened to a wider market. At present, it seems predominantly to serve hon. Members seeking extracts of their own speeches. The unedited archive constitutes a key source of historical material. If we had the technology available and Parliament had passed the necessary orders 100 years ago, we might now be able to look at the speeches made by Gladstone and Disraeli. I suspect that most of us would be able to learn a lot about debating style from them.

The archive is not only of educational importance now, but will leave a priceless legacy for generations to come. In the year 2095, people will watch the gladiatorial confrontations between right hon. Members on both sides of the House with some interest.

The archive also provides a testimony to the workings of British democracy, and it needs to reflect that democracy and to show the people out there exactly how we work. An important aspect of the record is that it is a record of Parliament working—it is not intended to be entertainment. Bringing the cameras into the Chamber so many years ago has affected the way in which the House conducts itself, which I find regrettable.

The report examines the potential for making more extensive use of the archive and maintaining it as a more financially viable entity, while putting it to educational use. While the nature and extent of the market for videos featuring archive material is still a subject for debate, the production of video tapes for educational purposes has already met with some success and provided insight into the market. The report mentions the video "Order, Order", produced by the Library's education unit, in collaboration with Force 8 Communications Ltd., which has sold almost 1,000 copies since its launch in September 1992.

Ventures such as that and the production of other educational, special and general interest tapes in conjunction with production companies could provide more income and perhaps a viable commercial foundation on which to build. To that end, the Broadcasting Committee has fairly comprehensively tackled key issues of pricing, by reviewing the rate card and royalties.

While that will help to ensure that the unit is as financially efficient as possible, the Committee's report asserts the belief that

"the operation should be run on an efficient but not entirely commercial basis."

I am sure that if we had to run it on an entirely commercial basis, we would soon conclude that it was not possible to make a profit and it might disappear, which would be most regrettable.

Interested parties can gain easier access to parliamentary proceedings without being hindered by costs imposed by market forces, and the democratic spirit of the set-up is maintained in the report. As we heard from the Leader of the House and the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, education is a key sector that will benefit from the archive, but it is one that is relatively poor. I shall not deal with the crucial, and relevant, issue of funding of education, much though I am tempted to do so.

We need to look to the future. I was alarmed by some of the comments of the hon. Member for Leeds, West about losing the technology to read CD-ROMs. If we move to CD-ROMs, I do not think that that will happen, and I speak with 25 years' experience in the computer industry. Perhaps I should declare an interest in International Computers Ltd. while I am on the subject of computers, CD-ROM and technology. CD-ROM and the digital age are here and the information super-highway will be installed nationwide at some time in the future. I was concerned about some of the comments of the hon. Member for Leeds, West, although I would support him about keeping the archive in a readable format because tapes deteriorate.

The hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) was here earlier, and he and I exchanged grimaces about the football result at Bolton last night, which I hope is in order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are both Swindon Town supporters and in my archives I keep a copy of the 1969 league cup final, which Swindon Town won 3:1 after extra time. It is a much-scratched version, and eventually I shall have to have it copied or I shall not be able to see it again. The match last night stopped Swindon Town from going to Wembley to repeat that great victory.

Video tapes require a lot of space for storage and, given the number of hours that the House sits in a year, they must take up a sizeable amount of space. As the hon. Member for Leeds, West said, video is not durable or stable, and that problem has to be tackled.

I suspect that CD-ROM is the way forward. Its life expectancy has yet to be determined, but the prognosis is certainly more optimistic than that for video, and it is inherently a more stable medium. I envisage the possibility of a public service system similar to video on demand on the information super-highway, which will enable people to dial up the debates of their choice. They might even dial up this debate to find out what happened when we discussed the archives of the House.

With CD-ROM, specific debates will be easier to access, facilitating the editing and production of special interest videos. That process will go hand in hand with the computerisation of *Hansard*, although I support the

[Mr. Nigel Jones]

hon. Member for Leeds, West when he says that we must keep a paper record as well. It would be deplorable if we were to let go the paper version of what goes on in this place. There is a job for someone to do—comparing what the video shows and the way in which the good people from *Hansard* tidy up some of the events in this place. A fascinating exercise—one thinks, "I am sure it wasn't like that," but they do an excellent job.

The digital revolution will have profound consequences for the democratisation of Parliament. Those can be advantages only if we anticipate them now and plan for potential problems, such as the regulation of the use of archive material. The Leader of the House has already spoken about some of the regulations that we think appropriate.

Once the initial investment in setting up a system for the equivalent of video on demand has been made, the cost of maintaining the archive and of making it more widely accessible will be significantly reduced. One of the main problems for the education market is that many teachers simply record coverage of Parliament off television to illustrate a point. That is not only because of cost. Another reason is that they prefer to illustrate lessons with contemporary issues, to which their students can more readily relate. Thus a video produced and purchased in a given month or year is often of little use at a later date. The easier access to a debate facilitated by CD-ROM would obviously solve that problem.

Use of new technology will put parliamentary debates on line internationally and I am sure that there is an export market because whenever I go abroad people tell me how much they enjoy watching our proceedings in the House—usually Question Time. They regard it as entertainment rather than the House at work. I am sure that there is a market to be tapped.

In terms of funding the digital archive, charges could be levied on a subscription basis if necessary—similar to the Internet or the Press Association wire. The charge could be made commensurate with the users' ability to pay, along the lines of the present rate card scheme, which is discussed in the report.

The archive has been set up. We have the resource. Let us continue in the spirit of the Broadcasting Committee's report, to keep it running and extend its advantages to everyone now and in the future.

7.38 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I shall be brief as I am conscious of having spoken quite often this week. I strongly support recommendation (x) in the conclusions on page xix of the Broadcasting Committee's report. For anyone reading the debate or the report I should explain that there is a slight slip-up on the contents page as the page numbers are given in ordinary and not Roman numbers, which is wrong.

It would be an abuse for slips or deliberate statements made in the House to be used by opponents for political purposes and it is getting away from the normal rough and tumble of election or party political broadcasts. It would be misusing the correct decision to bring television into the Chamber. I am glad that my right hon. Friend was able to report to the House the conclusion that the Committee reached.

We must find ways of making what goes on in the House accessible to people in the country who are interested. I came to party politics rather late—some people may think that I never got there. In the year before I first stood for election, I subscribed to the daily *Hansard* for a year. I was not earning very much, but it was not a big hole in our finances.

I do not think that I could do that in an equivalent position now. To pay more than £7 a day, five days a week, 34 weeks a year, would be beyond what most people would regard as reasonable. Yet the best preparation for a person thinking of entering Parliament—or for someone who is interested in politics but not in entering Parliament, which may be even more sensible—is to read what is said in Parliament, not what a sub-editor has taken out of a journalist's report.

I do not wish to criticise newspapers unnecessarily, because usually they should be criticising politicians, rather than the other way round. We read in *The Times* this morning a report of the questioning of the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, by one of our Committees, which said that he had had to correct something that he had written in relation to some inquiry, when in fact it was simply changing the word "their" in a letter to either "the" or "his". Readers of *The Times* will have read that something has apparently gone wrong without knowing its context or scale.

There are other examples. The chairman of the Conservative party was in effect criticised by a leader columnist—also, as it happens, in *The Times*—yet we were not able to know what my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) had said. When I wrote to the columnist asking, "Why don't you let us in on the secret?" he mentioned the fact that I had written to him to comment on his comment, but he did not say what my comment was or what the original complaint was. We ought to make what is said quite easily accessible for those who have an interest in politics and in what happens in the Chamber.

Technology will help deliver that. Most of the debate has been about the video record of what is said, which the television cameras help produce. *Hansard* is digitised now. It would be easy to put that on the Internet. We can have it on local network anyway, but having it on the Internet allows people to pull out the roughly 60 pages a day of proceedings in the Chamber and the roughly 60 pages a day of written answers. If we have a Wednesday session, there may be an extra 40 pages. That is not a complicated thing for the technicians to make available.

However, not everyone will be able to use the Internet. We need to consider what the report says directly about the archive material from the television cameras—and the House can be satisfied that the Committee has done its work well—but also, if it becomes possible to keep a digital record of the video, in the way that one can now of the digitised words in the *Hansard* report, I hope that the Committee, in its next set of investigations and considerations, will discover whether that can be made available to people free of charge. If the marginal cost of making it available is nil—if people dial in to a solid state data bank—the charge should be nil. That is part of what our portion of democracy should be about.

I return, at the margin of the debate, to *Hansard*. In the supplementary memorandum submitted by the editor of *Hansard*, we are told that the only subsidised copies of *Hansard*, besides those that go to Members of Parliament,

are those that go to rate-funded public libraries. That is not good enough. I do not want to become involved in the economics of Her Majesty's Stationery Office or the copyright, but I believe that we need to find a better way of making the words available as well as storing the pictures.

7.42 pm

Mr. Newton: There was a moment when I feared that I would be encouraged by those who control all our lives to make a lengthy speech, for reasons that people may guess, but happily I am not in that position and I wish only to make a few brief remarks in response to the debate.

First, I congratulate all three hon. Members who have spoken in the debate on the constructiveness and thoughtfulness of their contributions, and, in the case of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), the evidently substantial research that went into some parts of his speech. I am grateful for their supportive comments.

The only thing that bothered me, as the debate proceeded—as it has done on several other occasions when I have strayed into the Chamber rather than being an active participant in debates that involve the discussion of information technology—was my gathering bewilderment as people spoke about the Internet, the information super-highway, and some person called SuperJANET who appears to be the only person on the information super-highway. I am happy to say that I am not drawn further into that difficult subject and I can concentrate on the more mundane arguments that have been made in the debate. I shall mention three.

First, the hon. Member for Leeds, West rightly drew attention to the role of the Library's Public Information Office and the education unit. He will have noted that paragraphs 45 to 49 of the report discuss the inter-relationship between the Supervisor of Parliamentary Broadcasting and those two units. They are certainly talking together and, knowing the people involved, I am sure that they will work constructively together to ensure that each has a good part in helping as much as we can to ensure that sensible and useful educational material is made available.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Leeds, West mentioned the status of the written word, and that subject was picked up in various ways by those who succeeded him in the debate. Recommendation (xvi) of the report is

"that consideration be given to the inclusion with all tapes of Committee proceedings of a note to the effect that the official record of the proceedings is the transcript of evidence"—

that is to say, *Hansard*.

It may be of interest to the House to know that that recommendation was designed to avoid confusion about the status of the tapes vis-a-vis the transcripts, but the Procedure Committee is currently examining—that comes close to picking up an argument made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley)—a proposal to enable Members to obtain *Hansard* transcripts of proceedings in the House on the day of origination, which is at present not practical because we have to wait until the printed version appears on the following day.

Thirdly, the price of *Hansard* has been mentioned in every speech. That has been the subject of a good deal of comment in recent months, and indeed of a rather critical report from the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government. The House is probably aware, and I am very conscious, that the issue of the price of *Hansard* is being examined currently by the Administration Committee of the House at the request of the House of Commons Commission, chaired by Madam Speaker. I do not know what will emerge from that, but it is very much a response to the anxieties that have been expressed in the debate and elsewhere.

With that, I need say no more except to express my gratitude to the House and my thanks to the House for being, as I judge, ready to endorse the report of the Committee that I have the honour to chair.

Resolved,

That this House approves the First Report of the Select Committee on Broadcasting of Session 1993-94, House of Commons Paper No. 112, on Developing the Parliamentary Broadcasting Archives.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BILL

Resolved,

That, in respect of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

OFFICE COSTS ALLOWANCE

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House, the limit on the office costs allowance in relation to Mr. Bernie Grant, for the quarter beginning 1st January 1995 and any subsequent quarter, should be 1.33 times the limit determined in accordance with paragraph (1) of Part A of the Resolution of 13th July 1994 relating to Members' allowances.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Natural Heritage

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

7.47 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): When Madam Speaker allocated the debate—the last this week, and at an earlier hour than many of us anticipated—it was assumed that it would be a debate about the national, not the natural, heritage. As the national heritage nowadays appears to be largely focused on gambling, it is perhaps not surprising that, at the beginning of the week, I was approached by several organisations concerned with gambling. I was relieved to be able to correct their impression.

The debate may be rather more important. The House might care to consider also that, although there is a special care and a justified concern in the House about cruelty to animals, and that was demonstrated last Friday, there should be slightly more anxiety about the survival of a whole species rather than simply cruelty to a few members of that species. That is what the real anxiety is about—the survival of a species and the habitat on which that species may depend.

I sought this debate to give the House an opportunity to consider and have on record comments with regard to European Nature Conservation Year 1995. I attended the Council of Europe Assembly in January, where I presented a report on behalf of the Environment Committee to launch that desirable campaign. I was grateful that the report was unanimously approved there.

This debate allows me to ask the Minister to explain the Government's approach to the campaign and ascertain what official action is being taken and what support the Government are providing. I know that a major aim—perhaps the major aim—of the campaign is to promote wider public awareness of the need for conservation of our natural heritage, and I hope to show, in my relatively short speech, how essential that awareness is. The Minister may then care to comment on the case that I shall present.

In 1975, my private Member's Bill became the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act 1975. At the outset, the then Secretary of State, Tony Crosland, ordered that every school should receive a poster illustrating the 20 species of flora and six species of fauna included in the schedules to the Act.

In January, I saw some posters that had been produced by the nature conservation department of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. There was a display of photographs that could make an enormous impact, and the poster embodies a selection of those photographs. Will the Minister take a leaf out of the book of the Department of the Environment in the 1970s and provide one of those posters for each school in Britain? If the aim is to promote awareness, no better step could be taken.

That awareness is needed is adequately revealed by a recent publication produced on behalf of the voluntary bodies concerned with nature conservation. As the Minister will be well aware, I refer to the document entitled "Biodiversity Challenge". It is the work of a team drawn from the voluntary organisations, and not only presents an analysis of conservation need today, but proposes action that should be taken to halt the decline. I shall demonstrate the fact that there has been decline and there is an acute need for action.

"Biodiversity Challenge" presents an agenda to protect our natural inheritance, and proposes courses of action that can deal with the serious problems. The study is to be welcomed, not least because it is highly responsible but especially because its approach is practical. It demonstrates that the plans for action that it contains have been costed. It shows how much could be achieved and spells out what the costs would be.

Much needs to be done, and we can now see how much can be done for relatively little expense. Will the Minister recommend those proposals to his colleagues in the Treasury with more confidence than might otherwise be the case, because even people employed in the Treasury must have regard to what this country will be like next year and for the next generation?

Action is certainly needed. In the past 25 years, 70 species of British fauna and flora have become extinct, at least in these islands, but some were found only in these islands. So the loss is not merely ours but international. Some of those vanished species may have passed unnoticed, but their loss should not be dismissed lightly.

Shoreham has been in the news recently. A great deal of attention has been focused on the traffic in animals destined for slaughter from that port, but little attention was paid to a vanished invertebrate that lived by Shoreham—I refer to Ivell's sea anemone, a tiny fawn and rose-spotted 12-tentacled creature. It was seen near Shoreham for the last time a few years ago but has now vanished, and the world will probably never see it again. Those who wish to see it will have to look at a picture.

"Biodiversity Challenge" illustrates case after case of that kind. I believe that the Minister's constituency is fairly close to Hampshire or Dorset. A plant that may be found in his constituency is the early gentian, which may be about to disappear. "Biodiversity Challenge" offers a plan that might save it, and the Minister will have constituents who would wish that plant to be saved and may be concerned about retaining an adequate genetic balance in these islands.

"Biodiversity Challenge" lists all the species that have become extinct this century. We can thus see clearly how the pace of decline has accelerated in more recent years. The threat of further losses is severe for, today, many species are endangered. This century, we have lost 49 species of lichen, 53 species of fungi and 13 species of wild flowering plants. Those include the peach-leaved bellflower, summer lady's tresses and lamb's succory, which are no longer to be found in our country.

It is not only flora that have vanished. The opossum shrimp has gone, as have four species of spiders, three species of butterflies, including the black-veined white, the large tortoiseshell and the large blue. I included the large blue in my private Member's Bill in 1975. It was on its last legs then, and one hoped that the gesture might help, but it died out in 1979. An attempt has now been made to reintroduce it, and I hope that it will meet with success. Although I may criticise alien importation, the species being reintroduced is from the same genetic species, so it should be all right.

Eleven species of moth have disappeared in the past 30 years, including the marsh dagger; the feathered ear, which is associated with our county, Mr. Deputy Speaker; and the Lewes wave. Interestingly enough, the last Blair's wainscot was recorded in 1966. Its remaining site on the Isle of Wight was destroyed by burning and draining. What a pity that the Blair's wainscot did not have its

home in constituencies where it might have been more cordially regarded, and where we might have been able to guarantee success. The Essex emerald disappeared earlier in the decade, largely due to lack of grazing, but work on sea defences may have been an important factor.

This century, 41 other species of insect have become extinct in Britain, including a dozen types of solitary bee. Many people may not be concerned about the extinction of insect species, but their loss can affect the food chain. However, millions of people are interested in angling, and the burbot, a species of fish, has vanished. One hopes that angling organisations will co-operate with the voluntary sector with a view to arranging to restock. Yesterday, I mentioned that matter to Lord Mason of Barnsley, who, with his interest in angling and his noted energy, may be able to help in that direction.

I referred a moment or two ago to the 1975 Act, which contained one schedule listing 20 species of endangered flora and six species of endangered fauna. The large blue butterfly has disappeared, despite legal protection, and the last mouse-eared bat expired in 1991.

The most vulnerable species in the schedule of the 1975 Act was the lady slipper orchid. There was only one plant left in 1975. There is still only one plant left today, and it is in Yorkshire. In fact, it is Yorkshire's best-kept secret, and those people who know where it is will not tell anyone else. One can guess the penalty of indiscretion—we would have no lady slipper orchids at all. I am delighted to learn that Kew gardens is living up to its splendid reputation and may produce a few more lady slipper orchids to guarantee the species' survival.

The first species to be protected in Britain were birds, seals and badgers. Birds are held in high regard by millions of our citizens and by some Ministers of the Crown who prefer birds of the feathered variety. Ministers frequently list birdwatching among their hobbies. Therefore, I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will respond to the voluntary sector's call in "Biodiversity Challenge" and thus secure the survival of some birds which are currently in serious danger of extinction.

The pine marten is extinct in Britain, and it is just hanging on in Wales. Its remaining stronghold—if that is the correct term—is Scotland. I hope that the proposals in "Biodiversity Challenge" for the retention and safeguarding of certain habitat will help to restore that species to England, so that it is not restricted entirely to the woodland areas of Scotland.

Some people may say that it is no good crying over spilt milk, that we should not spend money preventing the extinction of species and that we must expect reality. Certain changes in habitat may be unavoidable—for example, climate change and the effect of global warming—but I believe that the British population are concerned about the issue, and that they want the Government to address it as a matter of priority.

Parliament recognises that we are part of Europe. Although some hon. Members may not care to hear about it, Europe has begun to take a quite serious view of the wildlife issue. The European Community has issued directives, not least in regard to the protection of birds, and the Council of Europe has been concerned about habitat for a long time.

When I came to the House in 1970, I already had an amateurish interest in conservation. I pursued the establishment of the Badger Act 1973 and the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act 1975. However, I quickly recognised that there is little value in protecting a species if we allow the habitat upon which that species depends to be destroyed. I therefore took the view—over the years, the Council of Europe Assembly has adopted it also—that our priority must lie in protecting habitat.

I presented a report on that matter on behalf of the Environment Sub-Committee, which I then chaired, and that led to the Berne convention on wildlife and habitat. I was delighted that the British Government were one of the first to sign, ratify and implement that convention which formed a major part of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The Government acted swiftly on that occasion, and one hopes that, given the increasing challenges posed by the pace of change, they will maintain their commitment and accept that they have an obligation to ensure that this matter receives the same priority.

Many species are at risk today, largely because we have lost 60 per cent. of our lowland wet grassland, more than half our sand dunes, 60 per cent. of our fen habitat and 95 per cent. of our raised peat bog. Coastal lagoons have been reduced to an area of just 1,300 hectares. Ancient broadleaf woodland, which once covered huge areas of our island, has shrunk, and today covers only 300,000 hectares. The remaining Caledonian forest has been reduced to 12,500 hectares.

Limestone pavement has been reduced to 2,000 hectares—largely as a result of theft, sometimes by people who would be astonished if one accused them of that crime. Only 57,000 hectares of heathland are left on our island. Those remaining areas of habitat are not sufficient to guarantee the survival of scores of species, especially if that habitat is not managed properly.

"Biodiversity Challenge" lists plans for action in each of those habitat categories. It also demonstrates which endangered species will benefit and how that will be accomplished. The proposed plans seem eminently sensible and I hope that each set of plans for the respective habitat groups will be regarded seriously. We need to recognise decline and vulnerability. Far be it from me to advise the Government on how to restore its popularity, but I cannot think of anything that would attract large numbers of people back to the Government's corner faster than the recognition that they are concerned about the environment and about the future of this island.

As Government Members claim to be interested in wildlife, birdwatching and so on, I think that I am entitled to remind the Minister that eight bird species have suffered more than a 75 per cent. decline in their number since 1970—the corncrake, marsh warbler, red-necked shrike, common scoter, tree sparrow, grey partridge, wryneck and roseate tern. Only one quarter of their number that existed in 1970 remains today.

The decline is more extensive in well-known species. Some 16 species have lost between one half and 75 per cent. of their populations since 1970. They include: the skylark, linnet, song thrush and turtle dove. The decline continues. I said recently that it would be extremely sad if children who were studying English poetry read the poems of Clare or Shelley about the thrush or the skylark and had to ask their teachers or parents what a skylark or a songthrush was.

The natural phenomena of these islands have inspired British music, literature and art in all its forms. It would be criminal to deny ourselves and the next generation that

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

source of future inspiration. The danger that species of that kind will disappear is sufficient to justify my suggestion that the Minister should, if necessary, take on the Treasury with a little more vigour than might have been shown previously.

Some people believe that, if a species is endangered or if it disappears altogether, we can simply bring in another species from overseas, and that it is all very well to import alien species in order to enrich the variety of wildlife in Britain. However, I think that it is timely to remind the Minister not to allow alien importation unless it has been considered very carefully. Some people brought in Japanese knotweed, and that was disastrous. Others brought in mink and allowed them to escape, and they have had a savage effect on nature in many parts of the country.

We should consider others that are causing distress in the Yorkshire dales. Many people there were aware that the Atlantic crayfish was a useful part of the there natural phenomenon. The species is in decline in Britain partly because of pollution, but now it is under severe threat as a result of the marked competition from the American signal crayfish.

We need to recognise that there has to be care about importation. I believe we could certainly justify the movement of some pine martens from Scotland if their habitat can be securely safeguarded in England. There is no problem about that. There is certainly no problem about the carefully prepared reintroduction of the white-tailed eagle by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. That bird became extinct in 1916, but it has now been reestablished. The numbers may not be excessive, but the re-establishment seems to be secure. I hope that the large blue butterfly can also be restored to Britain. Care and consideration are required.

The Minister will probably confirm that some of the commitments and obligations to which I have referred were certainly reinforced, if not originated, by the Rio agreement, and we would be fulfilling some of the obligations which stem from that conference. For that reason, I suggest that we give some priority to the need to secure and properly manage areas of lowland heath. If we did, we would actually be securing the future of 12 threatened species, and we would enhance the areas involved. That approach would provide a very real recognition of the work of a number of wildlife trusts in several counties.

Perhaps the most significant plan of action is that referring to the Caledonian forest. The cost of implementing the proposed 10-year programme would be £700,000 a year. The envisaged programme would not only secure the 12,500 hectares of Caledonian forest that remain, but would add an additional 5,000 hectares. It would cost £700,000 a year, but it would provide jobs. If one provides jobs, one secures contributions from the individual employments and the savings which accrue if they do not remain unemployed, so £700,000 is certainly not an unrealistic figure for a result which would transform many areas and would give us cause for pride internationally. As the Minister will be aware, the Caledonian forest in these islands is of international conservation significance.

Safeguarding the limestone pavements to which I have referred would ensure the survival of a number of species including the Lancashire whitebeam and rigid butler fern. I would prefer species unique to Britain to survive rather than people to be allowed to take more limestone pavement to enrich the rockeries in their gardens. Several other species would be safeguarded by that approach.

The voluntary bodies have analysed the need and the nature of the action required for each of those habitats. They demonstrate what can be achieved, and the benefit could be of historic proportions.

As a Member of Parliament representing South Yorkshire, I should refer to the lowland raised bogs. In South Yorkshire, at Thorne and Hatfield moors in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), two insects, the ground beetle and the mire pill beetle, are not found anywhere else in the world. I know that people are not particularly fond of beetles, although one Conservative Member breeds worms, but not many us share her taste or her political views. Those two species are the only ones in the world; they are found in the Thorne and Hatfield moors and represent a further argument for ensuring that that habitat deserves some priority.

There are a number of studies within the biological diversity. I shall refer to four of them as examples of the plans which the document provides. The freshwater pearl mussel is in the IUCN data book as extremely endangered species internationally. It is still to be found in some waters in Britain, and we have an obligation to ensure its survival. It can be achieved at very little cost. It requires some monitoring, and perhaps an improved provision of special sites of scientific interest status where its main breeding potential exists.

The southern damselfly is known in 18 localities in west Wales, Anglesey and the New forest, and is another species which the Minister might care to protect. It is globally threatened. Its breeding sites need to be protected and SSSI designation could be a considerable help. In respect of the freshwater mussel and southern damselfly, the designation of SSSIs involve remarkably little cost are once again represent scope for successful confrontation with the Treasury.

I mentioned the burbot a moment ago. The sturgeon is extremely rare in serious decline throughout Europe, and we need a European initiative to ensure that that important fish survives. The first step is not expensive. We need adequate funds to ensure proper study of the movement and the prospects for the sturgeon in Britain. Millions of anglers in Britain might welcome that involvement.

The corncrake was once an extremely common bird in the cereal areas of Britain. Its decline has not been sudden; it has continued for a long time. In 1993, there were just 478 active male corncrakes. Unfortunately, apart from a few in Fermanagh in Ulster, the rest are now restricted to the Scottish islands. Perhaps it could be introduced to protected grasslands areas in England, but only when we are satisfied that the habitat can securely sustain the species.

If we are to see an end of decline, or at least a beginning of the end to decline, we have to recognise that the disappearance of species is extremely important. At the moment, and inevitably, concern for conservation is still seen as a matter for the Department of the Environment. As it is the job of the Department of the Environment, other Government Departments tend to

ignore it. I hope that the Minister will recognise that and insist that other Government Departments are aware of their responsibilities.

Conservation is a matter for the Department of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Trade and Industry in particular, and those Departments must be aware that they cannot leave it all to the Department of the Environment; they have to give some attention and priority to the matter. They have to look at their wider responsibilities.

The rural White Paper is due in the summer. Heaven knows, rural life needs to be considered and sustained and rural services need to be regarded. I hope the Minister can assure us that conservation needs will loom quite large in that report and in the consideration which Ministers will give it. After all, conservation is essential for rural life.

I suspect that calls for the wider view would be endorsed by the Government's employees or advisers. Many who are employed in the public agencies—one can think of each of them—are far more knowledgeable, and perhaps far more concerned than most of us, perhaps because they have an almost daily exposure to the factors of need. The calls which I endorsed this evening originate from those who are responsibly involved in our large conservation voluntary bodies. They have professionally observed the disappearance of much wildlife and damage to much of its habitat, and believe that, if there is to be a future cause for inspiration in our culture, steps must be taken to ensure that the genetic inheritance of these islands is secured. ENCY 95 could serve a useful purpose in propelling understanding, and if there is understanding there will be strengthening of intention, and greater priority and urgency will be attached to implementing recommendations and fulfilling commitments that our sense of responsibility to the present and to future generations demands.

I trust that I have not spoken too long but that the Minister will recognise the seriousness of those matters, as millions of people do. I hope that his remarks will give them some encouragement.

8.20 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) for allowing me to contribute to his Adjournment debate. He put the case well. It is a happy coincidence that his debate occurs on an evening when it is possible to exceed the usual half hour. I welcome the presence of my hon. Friends the Minister and the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope).

First, I must declare an interest as adviser to the International Fund for Animal Welfare and to its founder, Brian Davis. That is not relevant to my remarks but a matter of record.

I first became aware of rare species in my early teens when, not a quarter of a mile from this place, I was shown a rare spider sitting in a hole in a brick. A few years later, between school and university, I stood in for the director of studies of a grammar school for three weeks while the director, Mr. John Bechervaise, went off on an Antarctic relief ship. In his absence, I read the diary that he had kept when he led an Australian Antarctic expedition. During the long winter, he observed a small jar of earth with a microscope. His tales of the life within that small amount of earth measuring no more than 12 sq in extended almost to the galaxy of species spoken of by the hon. Member for Wentworth.

For a year, I had responsibility, as a Northern Ireland Minister, for the environment and agriculture, when I was well advised by voluntary groups and civil servants. I am not sure that there are many or any corncrakes still in west Fermanagh. The corncrake does not always remain in fields set aside for hay because it finds an easier life in the fields designated for silage. Unfortunately cutting silage also cuts up the corncrake.

Habitat is rightly identified by those who put forward a biodiversity challenge. One day, we will need to go broader in protected areas. As someone who has heard the corncrake, I would strongly recommend some way, especially in these days of set aside and extensive agriculture—that is, of low inputs—of offering up more of west Fermanagh to non-silage fields. The advantage otherwise to the individual farmer might be surrendered, provided that compensation is generous. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will put that point to his colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office.

In Northern Ireland, the research advice that I received was that less than 2 per cent. of bovine tuberculosis cases might come from badgers. It is believed that most transmission is by cattle nosing each other over fences, and that double fencing would make it possible to keep particular herds of cows or beef apart. It is sad to continue gassing badgers, particularly in south-west England, on the evidence of inadequate research. Thousands of badgers are killed that way each year, but that appears to have no effect on tuberculosis among herds in the south-west. Gassing badgers should be reviewed, but that matter goes beyond habitat.

It is important to use advice from nature organisations in helping to re-establish the red squirrel in areas where it has lost its prominence. The red squirrel is still seen on the Isle of Wight, but I would like to see more of that species in England.

Mr. Hardy: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that ill-considered reintroductions of the red squirrel to any part of the country should be avoided, unless it is reasonably certain that it will survive?

Mr. Bottomley: I agree. The otter has returned because the environment changed. It can travel enormous distances. The otter population was seriously declining in the early 1950s, when I first saw an otter. In fact, I pretended to see one, but my sister did so, in Shropshire. If the environment is protected or improved, species re-establish themselves. Of most importance is that they do not die out or fall further behind in the struggle to survive.

The hon. Gentleman made important points about the skylark and songthrush. No one who has heard a skylark would say that it should be lost from this country. It unites our history and much of our cultural inspiration, be it music or poetry, and is a strong part of country life.

Referring again to Northern Ireland, Strangford lough is an amazing place. There is an enormous change of water twice a day through a narrow strait. When large-bottomed trawlers passed through, virtually everything was scraped away. That may be tolerable in some marine areas but not in one unique in the United Kingdom. I did all that I could to ban those trawlers from

[Mr. Bottomley]

the lough. If people tell the Government, "There is a major problem and if you wait too long, it will be too late," the Government have a responsibility to react.

It is really a question of building effective alliances, and I add my support to the simple request of the hon. Member for Wentworth for a way of getting a good poster into all schools. Most of the 14 million children in this country are at school. If they can be sensitised to part of their heritage, they will carry on the work long after we are forgotten. There will be continuing interest not just from those who live in the countryside but those in towns and cities. The battle cannot be won only by people who live and are interested in the countryside. It must be a national effort. The Government are right to take an interest. They have done many things better, but there is more to do.

People who tend urban gardens often want to enrich the soil. If they continue to do that using peat, they will in effect rob one the country of one of its irreplaceable habitats. I hope that gardening pages will support what has been said in the House today and will recommend that gardeners find other ways of enriching their soil, rather than destroying a scarce part of this country's heritage.

8.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): This has been an educational debate. It has been educational for me because the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) have much greater detailed knowledge of species than I have. I am grateful to them, and especially the hon. Gentleman, for giving me the opportunity to explain some of the important developments that are taking place in the conservation of the natural heritage.

Over two years ago, more than 150 Heads of State and Government recognised the importance of conserving the earth's flora and fauna by signing the convention on biological diversity at the earth summit at Rio. That fact was mentioned by the hon. Member for Wentworth. By signing the convention, the Government demonstrated their determination to play a full part in halting the global loss of animal and plant species and genetic resources. We followed this up with the UK biodiversity action plan, which was published in January 1994. The UK is one of the first parties to produce an action plan for biodiversity alongside its sustainable development strategy.

The action plan sets out a strategy for the conservation of the natural heritage for the next 20 years. For the first time in a Government paper the plan draws together existing instruments and programmes for nature conservation and commits Government to a forward strategy and performance targets. A vital part of the strategy will be schemes for the conservation of certain endangered wildlife habitats and species of animals and plants. The aim of the schemes will be to preserve and, wherever possible, enhance the range and biodiversity of naturally occurring wildlife in the UK.

Again, we are the first country to have given a commitment to produce specific costed targets for key species and habitats. We are working closely with the voluntary conservation sector in developing the targets, under the umbrella of the biodiversity steering group, which is chaired by my Department. We shall publish the targets for consultation by the end of the year.

The commitments to forward action are comprehensive and cover protected areas, the wider countryside, threatened species, public awareness, local initiatives, support for biodiversity overseas and better access to biological information and data.

I think that it will be agreed that the initiatives build on an already excellent record for nature conservation. The Government have had active policies for the conservation of nature for many years which have enabled us to protect endangered habitats and species and meet all our international conservation obligations. They are implemented mainly through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the network of sites of special scientific interest, of which there are now over 6,700 in the UK. The Act gives strict protection to 167 species of plants and to 94 animal species. There is a regular review of the schedules to the Act to ensure that they reflect the needs of the threatened species.

We believe that the policies are working. There are many exaggerated claims about the loss of SSSIs, but in recent years the numbers of them and the area of land that they cover have increased substantially, while within the SSSIs the rate of habitat loss and damage through development and inappropriate management has declined significantly. Importantly, we believe that most of the damaged sites will recover their special interest. The Government have shown themselves ready to address problems where they have been identified, and the measures that are being taken by English Nature and under agri-environmental initiatives should further reduce the incidence of avoidable damage in future.

Statistics are needed to highlight the important issue and help both policy makers and the public to understand whether environmental quality is generally improving, and whether our development is sustainable. In November 1993, the Department published the results of the countryside survey 1990, which is the most comprehensive survey of the countryside that has ever been carried out. The UK is the first country to carry out such a survey, based on the integration of remote sensing and field survey data at a national scale.

The primary aims of the survey were to provide information on the stock of land cover, landscape features and habitats in Great Britain in 1990, to identify change in these by reference to earlier surveys and to establish a new baseline for the measurement of future changes. Not all the changes that the survey reported were positive. For example, it showed a 23 per cent. reduction in the length of hedgerows between 1984 and 1990, and there was a decline in the diversity of plant species in arable fields, grassland and woodland.

The countryside survey 1990 is part of a framework of research that is geared to understanding the effects of land use change and improving access to information on the countryside for policy purposes. It is planned to use this approach as a basis for regular reporting on the state of the countryside, with follow-up work on the causes of the changes reported in the survey and their significance for wildlife and biodiversity, as well as a full repeat survey in the year 2000. To improve access to the results of the survey and other information about the rural environment,

the Department has developed a computerised countryside information system, which is now available as a commercial product.

The Government's nature conservation advisers—English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales—base their conservation activities on working together with landowners and occupiers, and with local communities, to preserve and enhance wildlife habitats and species. I note the possibility that was referred to by the hon. Member for Wentworth and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham of providing posters for schools. I shall certainly examine that.

From my own experience, I share the concern of the hon. Member for Wentworth about the introduction of alien species. As my accent makes clear, I come from a country which suffered from the massive introduction of English species such as rabbits, hares, pigs, cats and dogs—

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Convicts.

Sir Paul Beresford: And people, not convicts. Someone's geography is a little inaccurate. The damage to the natural habitat was considerable.

It is because of the success of conservation of the natural heritage in the UK that we depend on the support and commitment of those who own or work the land and on everyone who enjoys our natural heritage. While recognising the need to provide for man's needs—economic, social and recreational—it is important to promote an understanding of wildlife and an awareness of the threats to it, especially to those species or habitats that are threatened or are declining.

The emphasis on understanding and local involvement is a central theme of European Nature Conservation Year 1995. The UK is playing a full part in marking it. The hon. Member for Wentworth has rightly signalled it as a key initiative with its theme, "Look to the future, look after nature". The UK is represented by English Nature on the Council of Europe's committee and it is co-ordinating a myriad activities across the UK. The UK programme is planned to provide a wide variety of events and projects. The wildlife trusts are playing a central role by providing a local telephone advice service throughout England and co-ordinating a massive appeal called "A Million for Wildlife". The trusts are looking for 1 million days of volunteer action, and are raising £1 million to help local wildlife in 1995. There are many more initiatives.

European Nature Conservation Year emphasises sustainable management to improve biodiversity as a key principle. We know that truly natural environments have become increasingly rare. Nature has adapted to our management of the land, and much of the natural diversity nowadays is dependent on the continuation of traditional techniques of land management. It is this biodiversity that gives us the variety and character of the landscape that we value so highly.

The aim is not to make conservation of our natural heritage and economic activity mutually exclusive, but to ensure that man's activities are undertaken in ways that do not threaten our natural heritage, and wherever possible in ways that support it. The right sort of economic activity can sometimes protect or even enhance the environment. Good examples are the progressive reforms of Europe's common agricultural policy, which through agri-environmental programmes and environmental cross-compliance have enabled the Government to promote nature conservation in the wider countryside. We have done this by introducing schemes such as environmentally sensitive areas, the countryside stewardship scheme, nitrate-sensitive areas and the habitats scheme, which assist farmers to manage their land in ways that contribute to overall conservation goals outside protected areas.

The planning policy guidance note on nature conservation was published last year. It gives the most up-to-date guidance to local planning authorities and developers on the Government's policy on conservation of our natural heritage and development control. This specific PPG reiterates the prime Government objectives for nature conservation and also gives a full explanation of the implications for planning authorities of the new habitats regulations that implement the EC's habitats directive. The directive will play a significant part in our strategies for nature conservation in the medium and long term, which are being delivered through the biodiversity action plan.

The habitats regulations complement the strategy and broader initiatives for the wider countryside. At the same time, they make a significant contribution to the directive's aim of helping to ensure biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora throughout the European Union, an aim which the Government wholeheartedly support. The habitats regulations also give legal effect to habitat protection under the EC birds directive, introduced by the habitats directive. Special protection areas, designated under the birds directive and special areas of conservation designated under the habitats directive will together contribute to the European Union network of sites to be known as Natura 2000.

The Government have made significant progress on the classification of special protection areas under the birds directive. In the past year, 23 SPAs have been classified in the UK, bringing the total to 102, covering more than 323,000 hectares. The Government are committed to an accelerated classification programme and further sites are in the pipeline.

Our commitment to the voluntary approach to nature conservation is reflected in the implementation of the habitats directive. We are committed to consultation on the sites proposed for designation under the directive. Advice from the statutory nature conservation agencies about which sites merit designation under the directive is currently being considered. The Government's proposals will be published shortly and a full and thorough public consultation at national and local level will begin.

In the coastal and marine environment, the Government have taken initiatives aimed at enhancing the effective co-ordination of policies for the coastal zone in England. December saw the launch of the coastal forum, chaired and serviced by the Department of the Environment. The forum provides for an exchange of views on coastal issues and builds on existing liaison arrangements at regional and local levels. Policy guidelines for the coast are also in preparation and will draw together in convenient form guidance that is already provided on coastal issues. A best practice guide will highlight good practice and clarify how different elements of coastal zone management plans interact, and a review of byelaw-making powers relating to coastal management is also under way.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

Last year, the Government also announced the rural White Paper, which will cover the issues of living in, working in and enjoying the countryside. The White Paper, which will be published in the middle of next year, will present a coherent view of Government policy for the countryside and will demonstrate the integration of rural concerns, across all Government Departments, which impact on the English countryside. There is no formal consultation, but we have written to 420 organisations, seeking their views, and so far have received 362 responses. The aim is to ensure that the resources that go into the countryside are used to the optimum effect, based on principles set out in the sustainable development strategy.

The sort of things that the paper will look at are: the impact of the common agricultural policy on the countryside and the Government's objectives for its further reform; making provision for necessary development and finding ways of providing that in a sensitive, well-designed manner; the dynamic relationship between towns and cities and the countryside; the sophisticated nature of economic activity in today's countryside and the importance of encouraging further economic development and diversification; the strengths of localism, including resistance to uniformity, the recognition of local identity and the role of local government; strengthening policies to respond to the decline in biodiversity and to protect and enhance the wider countryside as well as the most valued landscapes and habitats.

The White Paper is not about quick fixes or instant initiatives. It is intended to develop a long-term, strategic framework for the future of our countryside. Ministerial colleagues from my Department and from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have almost completed a series of seminars around the country to listen to the views of local representatives.

I believe that tonight I have briefly outlined a wide range of initiatives, from the biodiversity action plan to the rural White Paper, which demonstrate that the Government are taking a strategic view of the conservation of the natural heritage, which will take us forward positively and sustainably into the next century.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 13 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Roads

1. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total spending by central Government on roads in Wales since 1979; and how many miles of motorway and trunk roads have been laid since that year.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): Since 1979, total spending by central Government on the roads programme in Wales has been over £2.6 billion, including £468 million in transport grant. Twenty-eight miles of motorway and 162 miles of trunk road have been completed or improved. Seven major improvement schemes totalling over 27 miles are under construction.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that considerable progress has been made in improving the motorway and trunk road network in Wales since 1979? Will he further agree that this has been of considerable help in attracting inward investment to Wales?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. The M4 and the A54 corridors have been most successful in attracting businesses. I should draw attention also to excellent train links. We are keen to encourage more freight by rail as well as by road. There are several policies that we are following with that in mind.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the Secretary of State agree that the £60 million River Dee crossing scheme will hugely improve the attractions of Deeside industrial park? Is that why it is said that a United States pharmaceutical company will be coming to my constituency? Will he give some details about the project?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Dee crossing will be most important. Like the hon. Gentleman, I welcome the announcement by the Welsh Development Agency today that there will be about 200 more jobs in Clwyd as a result of a United States pharmaceutical company establishing its European base in a WDA factory at Deeside industrial park. It is most welcome news. I am sure that improved transport links were some of the factors that led to the announcement.

Mr. Sweeney: Can my right hon. Friend give any update on progress towards achieving a link road between Culverhouse Cross and Cardiff-Wales airport? Will he confirm that he will resist any attempts to produce such a link via a green-field site?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. We need to be careful about any such route. There are environmental and transport issues, which will be part of the judgment that will have to be made. I have asked that the county highway authority again examine its current proposals. I thought that they were too expensive. We need a scheme, however, and I hope that the authority will return soon with a sensible and realistically priced one.

Training for Work

2. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future funding and arrangements for training for work in 1995-96.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): Training for work will be funded from 1 April on the basis of results, instead of training weeks completed.

Training and enterprise councils have welcomed this change. They will, as a result, have a strong incentive to ensure that training for work is geared to qualifications and jobs; and the resources available for adult training will therefore be used more efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the Minister aware that the training element has been reduced to a mere two weeks? Companies that employ for temporary or seasonal work can clean up on grants while offering minimum training. I believe that it is possible for a department store to train its Father Christmas for a couple of weeks, hire him for a couple of weeks and then sack him, and thereafter claim £1,000 in grant under the new scheme. Other organisations that have been trying to undertake longer-term training are shutting down or contracting. If my worries, concerns and fears are true, will the Minister review the scheme?

Mr. Richards: As far as I am aware, there are no current training schemes for Father Christmases. The hon. Gentleman has raised a serious point and it would be helpful if he were to write to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlining precisely what he has in mind. If he wants to put the boot into Father Christmas, he should write to my right hon. Friend, who will consider what he has to say.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the training and enterprise councils can, and do, combine the roles of training and enterprise? Is he satisfied that a sufficiently high proportion of the TEC budget is finding its way to the sharp end?

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point, as, indeed, is his wont. Clearly, the purpose of funding is that it goes to the sharp end, to get people back to work and to ensure that they are qualified. Training is necessary to ensure that enterprise is allowed to flourish.

Mr. Win Griffiths: What was the outcome of the scheme in England which the Secretary of State said was successful? Is it not true that it was more difficult for women returning to work, and low achievers, to get on training courses because of the huge over-emphasis on

training success and job outcomes? Is there a case for rebalancing that, so that we can drive the cowboys out, still keep quality and go for the best in Wales?

Mr. Richards: The pilot schemes in England to which the hon. Gentleman referred took place over some two years. It is because of their success that we are now embarking on the schemes in Wales. Of course we are concerned with quality, and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications is charged with ensuring that awarding bodies assess properly and that quality assurances exist.

Education, Dyfed

3. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning funding for education in Dyfed.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I have received many representations on the issue of education funding in Dyfed. It is, however, for individual local authorities to determine how much of their available resources to direct towards each service, including education, in the light of their statutory duties and their perception of local needs and priorities.

Mr. Dafis: This year in Dyfed, all services have to be cut. When will the Welsh Office stop undermining the school system in Wales in pursuit of its aim of making all schools in Wales grant maintained? I want the Welsh Office to understand that its twin strategy of encouraging that through cuts for local education authorities and inducements for grant-maintained schools is well understood in Wales and is opposed. It is irresponsible at this time, as we approach local government reorganisation. Will the Minister agree to meet a deputation from governing bodies in Dyfed and elsewhere in Wales and listen to what they have to say, and to their discussion of solidarity with local authorities? Will the Welsh Office please desist from its current irresponsible strategy?

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend is not trying to force schools in Wales to become grant maintained. What he and I want to ensure is that parents in Wales have a choice. The hon. Gentleman talks about cuts in education, but perhaps he would do well to remember the following statistics. Between 1979-80 and 1992-93, the net funding per pupil in primary schools in his county of Dyfed increased by some 63.8 per cent. The corresponding figure for secondary schools was 53.7 per cent. Indeed, over the same period, spending per pupil on books and equipment in Dyfed increased by 36.8 per cent. in primary schools and by 66.1 per cent. in secondary schools. Those are the figures after allowing for inflation.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will my hon. Friend confirm that there is a surplus in the reserves of both local authorities and schools' own funds and that they are quite capable of paying for teachers' pay increases?

Madam Speaker: Order. The question concerns a particular area—Dyfed. Is the hon. Lady relating her question to that?

Lady Olga Maitland: Madam Speaker, I am relating it—

Madam Speaker: If it is a specific question, it should relate to what is on the Order Paper.

Lady Olga Maitland: I stand corrected. I am relating the question to Dyfed.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Lady is absolutely correct. In fact, in the 1993-94 fiscal year, primary school balances in Dyfed were some £2.3 million; the figure for secondary schools was some £1.6 million; and the education authority had a balance of £7.4 million, which aggregates to £11.3 million. On top of that, the figure for education and other administrations amounted to some £3.5 million. On top of all that, the Audit Commission report in January this year, "Paying the Piper, Calling the Tune", said that, throughout England and Wales, efficiency savings of some £500 million could have been made. In Wales, the figure is £30 million—all to be saved if education authorities and county councils go for efficiency cuts.

Mr. Ron Davies: For the record, Dyfed has raided its balances and now has one of the lowest in Wales. On top of that, it is faced with £4.5 million-worth of education cuts. I am not surprised that there is widespread concern: the public now see a Government making money available to suit their own political needs through the popular schools initiative, while denying the remaining schools funds that they need to meet the educational needs of their own programmes.

Is this not just another case of privilege for the few, at the expense of the choice and opportunity of everyone else? Does the Minister not realise that, just as he had to make a public apology recently for his ill-considered statements, he will shortly have to make a public apology for these ill-considered policies?

Mr. Richards: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should make such remarks about education spending in Dyfed. As I recall, the leader of the Labour group on Dyfed county council opposed the education authority's proposal for cuts. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should build up links outside the valleys of south Wales, in the rural parts that he never seems to visit.

As for the popular schools initiative, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set aside an additional £20 million to be spent on schools that are popular and therefore oversubscribed for the next four years. He wants to ensure that parents can choose to send their children to the good schools—the oversubscribed schools, the popular schools. That is why this is called the popular schools initiative.

Railways

4. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation his Department has undertaken of the likely impact on the Welsh economy of downgrading of railway service provisions in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I reject the malicious presumption in the hon. Gentleman's question. There are no plans to downgrade the railway service in Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister used the word "malicious", but I have not even started yet. There may be no such

intention, but I recently met the Secretary of State for Wales, who knows that in north Wales, for example, the Conwy valley line will shortly lose £900,000 in charges paid to it by the Trawsfynydd power plant. That obviously poses a threat.

The Cambrian line is also under threat, among others. Is any appraisal currently being undertaken, or is the Secretary of State as useless as he was said to be by Leslie Morgan the other day on the programme "On the Record"? That Conservative described the right hon. Gentleman as useless to mid-Wales, and said that the sooner he went the better.

Mr. Jones: I think that the "threats" are in the imagination of the hon. Gentleman, who rushes to scare his constituents and everyone else in Wales. The Franchising Director is conducting a review; he has already published his draft proposals for the Great Western service, and his proposals for the rest of Wales will follow in due course. The hon. Gentleman should approach the matter positively. The combination of privatisation and the channel tunnel represents a tremendous opportunity for the railways of Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: That is precisely the point. The Under-Secretary must explain why we should not expect the worst, given that the Great Western is the only service for which minimum requirements have been published. We see that there will be a 20 per cent. reduction on the Paddington to south Wales service, which will, in effect, end at Swansea.

There is massive public opposition to this madcap scheme, which will fragment the national service. It will waste £1 billion of taxpayers' money and cost thousands of jobs. Do the Government not realise that, if Wales is to have a successful and dynamic economy, we must have a properly planned, integrated and accountable transport system? No reputable Government would abdicate from that responsibility.

Mr. Jones: If the hon. Gentleman had done his research a little better, he would have known that this is the first passenger service requirement that has been published. The Franchising Director is now working on others for the rest of Wales. This is the first time that a minimum provision has been laid down, and I stress that it is a minimum provision. Great Western has already stated that its new timetable, which is to be introduced in May, will maintain the current service.

Business Rates

5. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the level of business rates imposed on small businesses in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Several.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Is the Minister aware that, as a result of the revaluation of business premises for the purposes of the unified business rate, holiday centres, caravan parks and retail premises in my constituency are suffering massive increases and will have serious problems meeting their new bills? Does he realise that, for example, up to 20 per cent. of retail premises in my constituency have closed over the past four years? Even allowing for transitional relief, those businesses will pay twice the rate of inflation on their new bills from 1995 onwards. Will the Minister intervene directly and ask the district valuer to be more realistic in terms of rental values in rural areas?

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that, as well as the change in the rateable value, there has been a consequential reduction in the rate in the pound, which goes down from 44.8p to 39p. The examples that the hon. Gentleman cites and all other small businesses in Wales have transitional relief and opportunities to appeal to the district valuer against the assessment after 1 April. I firmly believe that the system of uniform non-domestic rates is a far better system for businesses throughout Wales. It gives them the certainty, except in years of review, that they will face an increase of no more than the rate of inflation. As we can see from the emerging pattern of council tax increases in Wales, business would have suffered far worse if the uniform business rate had been determined by local councils.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that small caravan parks are a useful form of diversification for many farmers and that they provide substitute employment? Does he recognise that there will be a huge increase, particularly in the business rate paid by small caravan parks with fewer than 50 pitches, and that the appeals system will simply clog to a halt because of so many appeals? Will he institute an immediate inquiry into the effect of these changes on the caravan and holiday industry in Wales, which is in despair at the changes?

Mr. Jones: I readily acknowledge what the hon. and learned Gentleman says about the worth to agriculture and tourism generally of caravan parks. However, he should remember that they have not only the opportunity of transitional relief but the right of appeal. The appeals system, which I fully support, wishes to deal with appeals as expeditiously as possible.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend accept that small businesses in Wales would benefit from more prudent budget setting and more prudent policies by local councils? Does he also accept that small businesses in Wales benefit greatly from inward investment, which generates much business and many jobs in the small business community?

Mr. Jones: I certainly accept the thrust of my hon. Friend's point that businesses would suffer far worse if their rate burden were determined by councils in Wales. We know that this year small businesses will face, at worst, a 7.5 per cent. increase. The trend has not been finalised, but if they were to suffer the increase that is being imposed by councils in Wales, it would be more like 12 per cent.

Hospital Waiting Times

6. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultants in Wales had published waiting times for first out-patient appointments in excess of 104 weeks on 30 September 1994 or in any subsequent set of statistics published since then.

Mr. Redwood: Comprehensive information on waiting times for first out-patient appointments is not collected centrally for each hospital consultant but is available for health authorities and hospitals in general. However, the latest issue of the "Waiting Times Information Bulletin"

provides information on seven common surgical procedures. It shows that 15 of the 187 consultants included in the bulletin had a maximum waiting time of more than 104 weeks. That shows that the bulletin is doing exactly what it is intended to do. It lets people see where they have to wait a long time and where they can be seen more quickly, thereby enabling them to choose on an informed basis. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his party welcome that.

Mr. Ainger: Bearing in mind what the Secretary of State has just said, I challenge his figure of only 15. On my reading of that information booklet, there are 19 consultants with a waiting time of over two years. There are also in total 66 consultants with waiting times of more than one year, and those figures do not take into account urology, dermatology, trauma or general orthopaedics. How on earth is the Secretary of State going to put in place, between now and 1 April—two weeks away—the resources to ensure that patients get their first out-patient appointment within six months?

Mr. Redwood: That is exactly what I intend to do. My current advice is that the health service can meet the new standards as from the beginning of the next financial year and will deal with the backlog shortly thereafter. I hope that Opposition Members will welcome the information that patients get. As the brochure makes clear, in practically every case there is a surgeon available with a short waiting time, just as in some cases there are surgeons who are very busy.

Is the Labour party saying that I should issue instructions to say that no patient should be allowed to join the waiting list of a surgeon who is popular, and that patients must go to another surgeon even if they do not choose that? That would seem to me wrong. What we want is proper information; people can then weigh the name and the reputation of the surgeon against the waiting time. At the moment, we are meeting all the patients charter guarantees—I am pleased about that—and I intend the service to meet the new tougher guarantees next year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Has my right hon. Friend seen the consultants' report featured on the front page of the *Western Mail* today, purporting to show that £1 in every £10 spent in the NHS is spent on running it? Is that proportion correct and is my right hon. Friend satisfied with it?

Mr. Redwood: There are disputes about how to categorise administration and management costs, but I certainly think that we need to reduce some elements of the management costs. That is why I have imposed restrictions on new recruitment and have set out proposals to the House—along with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health in England—to make sure that we reduce the number of health authorities and the number of employees and managers that those health authorities enjoy. I believe that that is welcome in Wales. I think that it will mean tighter control over management costs at the centre and proper administration in hospitals. I have linked it to a big programme to strip out forms, administration and unnecessary paperwork—and I shall announce more proposals on that shortly.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Secretary of State accept that there are many who are sceptical about the prospects of genuinely achieving the shorter waiting times by 1 April, and that they include not only Opposition Members but health service statisticians? One of them wrote to Mrs. Menna Davies of the Vale of Glamorgan community health council a few weeks ago to say:

"The hospitals generally supply us with the best estimates they can but even those may be poor estimates of long-term waiting times."

Will the Minister therefore assure us that, in his attempt to achieve the figures that he has set out by 1 April, he will not once again be visiting the statistical massage parlour?

Mr. Redwood: I think that the hon. Gentleman means that he welcomes our policy, which is to cut waiting times and to try to get all out-patients meeting the necessary person in the health service within six months. I have already said that the health service is pretty confident that it can do that for new patients after the beginning of April. Thereafter we want it to clear the backlog as quickly as possible. I have been discussing with the service ways in which that can be done.

Business and Local Authority Links

7. **Mr. Flynn** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to improve relations between his Department and business and local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: I am improving relationships by holding meetings to review future plans for each area, by local authority business partnerships and by encouraging eight business development consortiums in Wales.

Mr. Flynn: Will not the Secretary of State's double standards wreck his relations with local authorities, given that he condemns them for their contacts with lobbyists but allows the Welsh Office an open door to its corridors, which are infested with lobbyists seeking to pervert public policy for their rich clients? Why does he allow that to happen; why does he not allow Parliament knowledge of how many lobbyists have contact with his Ministers and civil servants? Is this why prominent Welsh Conservative Leslie Morgan described the work of the Secretary of State this weekend as "really disastrous"?

Mr. Redwood: I was objecting to some local authorities spending taxpayers' money on employing consultants or lobbyists to do work that those authorities are capable of doing themselves. I do not intend to encourage that in the Welsh Office. I have taken a knife to the budget for consultancies, which are not right when we have talented officials who can do the job. I hope that local government will take a leaf out of that book.

Privatisation

8. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress in Wales of privatisation policy.

Mr. Redwood: Privatisation has brought lower prices—telephone charges are down by one third in real terms, and gas prices are down by more than one fifth. It has brought better service, more choice of telephones and better standards for dealing with customers. It has created several important private sector companies in Wales. With their new freedoms, they can now make a bigger contribution to the Welsh economy. In relation to the water industry, privatisation has increased the number of

beaches up to decent standards from 48 per cent. in 1986 to 76 per cent. in 1994. I hope that more progress will soon be made on that figure.

Mr. Booth: As, today, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) have restated their belief in more public ownership—whereas the people of Wales, whether taxpayers, customers or shareholders, know the benefits of privatisation—will my right hon. Friend restate and explain to the people of Wales the benefits of privatisation, and press on with more?

Mr. Redwood: I and my right hon. Friends will do exactly what my hon. Friend suggests. One important consequence of that policy is that more Welsh and British companies are world players in the world market. That can take place only if they are freed of public sector restrictions. It is then down to the talents of company employees and to the imagination of the management to win in the world market. That is exactly what the best privatised Welsh companies are doing.

Mr. Donald Anderson: When the Secretary of State is tempted to embark on further privatisation proposals, will he consider with some humility what happened in relation to the cardiac unit at Morriston Hospital NHS trust? His unique decision to put that cardiac project out to tender delayed by one year the start of the project and caused immense anguish to many Welsh cardiac patients, who had to travel to London. In the event, the solution achieved—the victory of the in-house team—was what everyone wanted all along.

Mr. Redwood: I am glad that Opposition Members are pleased with at least one part of the Government's health policy. I, too, welcome the victory of the in-house team. It put together a creditable bid. It showed that it would provide good value, which was the object of the exercise. This is not a specifically Welsh initiative. It is a common UK policy, where we decided that it was best to test the market to ensure that we got good value for big capital projects. It did not cause delay in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests. The business case and other paperwork must be produced, whether a project is publicly or privately financed.

Health Services, Gwent

9. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the Gwent health commission to discuss health service provision in Gwent.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales met all the health authority chairmen last Wednesday to discuss their proposals for improving services in the coming financial year. I shall be meeting the chairman of the Gwent health commission tomorrow.

Mr. Touhig: Is the Minister aware that, in 1993-94, my constituents made 33,000 visits to the out-patient department of Royal Gwent hospital at Newport, some 15 miles away from Blackwood in the centre of my constituency? Is he further aware that the public consultation in the recently published Islwyn health plan showed that the Islwyn community's primary priority was the need for a neighbourhood hospital that would offer an out-patient facility and a minor casualty department? Indeed, the Conservative party candidate pledged his support for that in the recent Islwyn by-election. Will the Minister join me in pressing the Gwent health commission to honour a pledge given in 1988, when the "Gwent 2000" document was published, to provide that facility, a pledge that was reiterated in 1992 when the neighbourhood health plan was published? Will he join me in pressing Gwent health commission to provide that hospital facility for Islwyn?

Mr. Richards: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his first Welsh questions. I assure him that the easy ride that he had in his maiden speech will be a unique experience. I am delighted that 33,000 of his constituents were able to have first-class treatment at Royal Gwent hospital—long may it continue. I am sure, however, that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Glan Hafren NHS trust is developing a proposal with a view possibly to having a community hospital in Islwyn. My right hon. Friend and I look forward to seeing that proposal.

Water Charges

10. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current method of charging for water.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The current method is a matter for the water companies in consultation with the Director General of Water Services.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that the charge for Welsh households this year is £260 compared with £160 in the Thames valley? That figure hits pensioners and other people on low incomes exceedingly hard. Next year, there will be yet another increase in real terms. Does the Minister not realise that the system cannot continue, with charges spiralling ever upward? Will he start to make a change by encouraging Welsh Water and other water companies to provide the automatic 25 per cent. reduction for single occupancy that is given in respect of council tax? Will he give an assurance that under no circumstances will metering be compulsorily imposed on Welsh households, because that would mean even higher charges?

Mr. Jones: Increased charges should be put into perspective. Over the next 10 years, the increase will be limited to 0.5 per cent. in real terms, and Welsh Water will invest £1 billion in Wales over five years—£500,000 every day of every year during that time. That will pay for cleaner beaches and improvements to the environment generally—changes that those of us who are concerned about the environment much welcome.

Public Appointments

12. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many individuals have been appointed to quangos in Wales from the Welsh Office register of candidates for public appointments since July 1993.

Mr. Richards: Between 1 July 1993 and 1 March 1995, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made 260 appointments, excluding reappointments, to non-departmental public bodies and national health

service bodies. Candidates are largely drawn from the departmental register in addition to other sources, including advertisements.

Mr. Hanson: Is the Minister aware that, following advertisements placed by the Welsh Office, thousands of people applied to serve on quangos but only a small proportion were appointed? At the same time, people such as Michael Griffiths, one of the Minister's close constituents, sits on six quangos and has the temerity to call his horse Quango King. Mr. Griffiths sits on many non-executive and executive bodies on behalf of Welsh people but is not in any way accountable to them. Should not the Minister open up quango selection systems to favour members of the public and to greater public scrutiny, and consider in due course proposals for a Welsh Assembly, to return accountability to the people of Wales?

Mr. Richards: Appointments to non-departmental public bodies are open to all. I invite the hon. Gentleman to write to me if he knows of anyone talented enough to be a chairman or non-executive member of a non-departmental public body—such as the person whom the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I reiterate that, when my right hon. Friend and I consider applicants for non-departmental public bodies, our only concern is to appoint the best people for the job. We do not even know what are their politics.

Environmental Agenda

13. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to which individuals and organisations he distributed his paper "The Environmental Agenda for Wales".

Mr. Redwood: "The Environmental Agenda for Wales" has been distributed to a wide range of interests in Wales, including all county and district councils, executive non-departmental public bodies, training and enterprise councils, district health authorities and national health service trusts, representatives of business and voluntary organisations and members of the public.

Mr. Smith: How can the Secretary of State justify his claim in his environmental agenda that he wants to involve local authorities whenever possible in making decisions on behalf of local communities when so many local authority powers have been passed to quangos? What policies does the right hon. Gentleman have to reverse that process?

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because that is exactly the policy that I am trying to pursue, against members of Labour's Front Bench, who seem reluctant to see any powers transferred from, for example, the Countryside Council for Wales to local government. There is an opportunity, but I will not force it down the throats of local government. I set out ideas for consultation. If local authorities want more responsibility for some local environmental matters, the offer is there. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, unlike members of his Front Bench team, will encourage that process, and then we can do business.

Green Belt

14. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many acres of green belt exist in Wales at present; what was the figure in 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are presently no green belts in Wales, nor were there in 1979.

Mr. Greenway: As an Englishman, I express surprise at that reply. Can my hon. Friend drag Wales into the 20th and 21st centuries and designate some of those beautiful rolling acres as green belt, as they surely should be? Is he looking into this matter or, if not, could he?

Mr. Jones: I can reassure my hon. Friend that the subject is being well considered. As the hon. Member for Cardiff, North, I am well aware of the problems and pressures of development, such as this. We already have green wedges in West Glamorgan and green barriers in Clwyd. South Glamorgan is bringing forward a proposal for a green belt around Cardiff. The work that my hon. Friend wants done is well in hand.

Educational Provision

15. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met council leaders in Wales to discuss educational provision and resources.

Mr. Richards: Discussions with the local authority associations about local government finance issues are undertaken in the forum of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. My right hon. Friend last chaired a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance on 30 December. I also met council leaders from Clwyd on 21 February.

Mr. Murphy: The Minister will have read his right hon. Friend's article in this morning's *Western Mail* in which he said that schools that were in trouble would have to be resourced by the local education authorities. As he has told the local authorities that they must use their balances to pay for the teachers' award, where will the money to help those schools come from?

Mr. Richards: I believe that my right hon. Friend was referring to any school governing body that might try to have a budget deficit. In that case, my right hon. Friend would clearly look to the local education authority, with regard to its local management of schools scheme, to ensure that those schools were funded properly.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church Buildings (Public Toilets)

22. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what financial provision is being made in the current year to equip churches, abbeys and cathedrals with public toilets.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): None. This is not the responsibility of the Church Commissioners. The parochial church councils of parish churches and the administrative bodies of cathedrals have sole executive and financial responsibility in these

matters, subject to any statutory consents that they may require to carry out work affecting the historic character of a building.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend assist incumbents who are paid by the Church Commissioners with the placement of public toilets in churches, bringing them into line with cathedrals, as many people want and as should happen as we enter the 21st century? I know of one church which, for two years, has tried to get the faculty to use money left to it to put in the public loo that people want and need. It has not so far been able to achieve that. Will my right hon. Friend put a bomb under the archdeacons who are so slow in getting things going?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend will agree that a bomb might be slightly counter-productive. He is concerned about public toilets in parish churches. He is probably aware that most parish churches have a toilet in the vestry for the use of the incumbent. It would have to be a parish in which relationships between the congregation and the incumbent had fallen to an exceptionally low level if members of the public were barred from using the facilities available in the vestry. I shall, however, draw my hon. Friend's anxieties to the attention of the relevant archdeacons.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a slightly broader point, which arises from the question, do the Church Commissioners have responsibility for ensuring that churches, abbeys and cathedrals are generally accessible to all members of the public, including those with disabilities? If not, could they see that as a generally useful responsibility?

Mr. Alison: We have some onerous responsibilities, as the hon. Gentleman knows, especially in property and finance, but we do not have direct responsibility for the matter about which he is concerned. For cathedrals, it comes within the ambit of the administrative bodies and for parish churches, especially large and popular ones, within the scope of responsibilities of the parochial church councils.

Investments

23. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what new proposals he has to improve the ethical accountability of the investments made by the commissioners.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners have always managed their investments within ethical guidelines. Specific rules were developed when equity investment was begun in 1948 and those rules continue to be monitored and reviewed. I am arranging for a leaflet setting out our ethical policy to be sent to the hon. Gentleman so that he may study it slightly more fully.

Mr. Flynn: Why have the Church Commissioners invested £1.75 million in GEC, Britain's second-largest arms manufacturer, which exports weapons of war to many foreign dictators? Recalling the words that he who lives by the sword will die by the sword, will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House how profiteering from the sale of arms assists the work of the prince of peace?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman will note, when he gets the little leaflet that I shall be sending to him, that we do not invest in companies whose principal business is armaments. I do not think that it could be alleged that GEC's principal business is that of armaments. As it is, investments relating to armaments, alcohol, gambling and tobacco, from which we are excluded on ethical grounds, already result in the disbarring of the Church Commissioners from about 12 per cent. of potential investments in the stock exchange, which has a serious effect on the potential flow of funds for clergy stipends and retirement pensioners.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

24. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what further reforms are planned for the administration of legal aid; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): Proposals for a fundamental restructuring of the legal aid scheme in England and Wales will be the subject of a Green Paper later in the spring.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that the Lord Chancellor is proceeding with the consultation on "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy" so that my constituents will not be outraged in future by very wealthy people benefiting from our legal aid system? Will he also confirm that, as part of the same review, he is looking very carefully at proposals for franchising, which will improve quality control of the legal aid system to benefit those who are using it properly?

Mr. Taylor: Consultation on "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy" has closed and we are assessing the results. I thank my hon. Friend for his forward-looking remarks about franchising and quality assurance. We are talking about quality assurance—ultimately—for the consumer and we are heartened by the number of solicitors applying.

Mr. Boateng: Does the Minister agree with the National Consumer Council that fear of costs is one of the biggest barriers to justice? If he does, how does he justify the fact that, even as we speak, his officials are actively considering increases for county court and High Court costs per day, making them some £200 in the county court and £500 in the High Court? How does that assist the ordinary litigant, the person of modest or medium means, who wants to bring an action before those courts? Is it not another example of the Government's denial of justice to those who most need it?

Mr. Taylor: I think that fear of costs is a deterrent to those who would go to law. That is not a novelty, but it may be as intense now as it ever has been. The county court fees to which the hon. Gentleman referred are visited rather irregularly for the purpose of review.

It is some time since some of those fees were looked at, but the broad objective is that, as far as possible, the operation of courts should be self-financing, lest otherwise the taxpayer pays for other people's cases.

25. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will review the law on legal aid contributions by plaintiffs where defendants cannot be found to be served with papers or orders in proceedings.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am not persuaded that there is any reason to change the regulations.

Mr. Hughes: Before I respond to that, may I tell the Minister how grateful were all the people who went to see him and his colleague the Lord Chancellor on Wednesday evening to ask for legal aid for the relatives of the Marchioness—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is out of order. I am sure that it is very apt that the Lord Chancellor's Department should be paid such compliments, but they must be paid in writing, and not at Question Time.

Mr. Hughes: I apologise, Madam Speaker. I thought that it would be discourteous to proceed without—

Madam Speaker: Not at all. It is discourteous not to deal with the question in hand.

Mr. Hughes: On the question in hand, will the Minister look again at a policy which says that the plaintiff may be assisted to get an order—in this case, against a person who had been violent and who was obliged by the order to leave the former matrimonial home—and then, because the defendant cannot be found and the order cannot be served, be required to pay for a proceeding that becomes effectively null and void? That cannot be in the interests of justice and it must be something which the Minister accepts needs to be reviewed, not just in a single case but in the interests of prospectively hundreds or thousands of litigants who would otherwise be put off seeking action to protect themselves and their own security.

Mr. Taylor: I may be aware of the individual case concerned. In a case where emergency legal aid is granted in the belief that the applicant qualifies, and the applicant subsequently proves not to, the applicant must pay. As for the hon. Gentleman's irregular remarks, I heard them and I took them kindly.

Case Transcripts

26. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what provision is made for people on low incomes to obtain transcripts of legal cases where they are victims.

Mr. John M. Taylor: All victims who request a copy of an existing transcript will be provided with one free of charge.

Mrs. Lait: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. However, does he acknowledge that victims often find it helpful to be able to read a transcript and that they may need to read one in order to bring a civil case in respect of which, as my hon. Friend is aware, original transcripts are not provided through legal aid? How can we ensure that those victims have access to justice?

Mr. Taylor: If it were not such a serious subject, I would have to say that there is no such thing as a free transcript. Where no existing transcript is available, a legally aided person may receive assistance in meeting the cost of transcription. That is the best that I can do at the moment. If my hon. Friend would like to return to the charge, I want to be as helpful in that part of victim support as I possibly can be.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the Minister accept that there is a problem in that transcripts often do not exist and will be made only when one of the barristers concerned in a case requests one? Therefore, the costs could be substantial. Does the Minister also accept that a victim, and particularly the relative of a murdered victim, may have a legitimate reason for wishing to have access to a transcript, but at the moment would find that transcript prohibitively expensive?

Mr. Taylor: I am not going to say that it is not quite expensive to have transcripts. It is very labour intensive to produce all the words spoken in a court. The best advice that I can give to the hon. Gentleman this afternoon is to say that people do not need to acquire whole transcripts. They can concentrate on that part of the evidence that is material to their complaint.

Magistrates Courts

27. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates courts have been closed in the past 10 years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Magistrates courts are provided by local authorities for the use of the Magistrates Courts Committee. Closure decisions are for the MCC, although the paying authority may appeal to the Lord Chancellor against a proposed closure. That is the only situation in which we are informed of a closure or involved in any way.

Mr. Ainger: The Lord Chancellor's Department will be well aware that, over the past 10 years, there has been a significant number of magistrates courts closures, particularly in rural areas. That has coincided with significant reductions in public transport. Does the Minister share my concern that people living in rural areas, particularly in rural Wales, are now finding it extremely difficult to meet court times of 10 am using public transport? That is causing serious problems. Those people who have to pay fines at magistrates courts are also experiencing serious problems. Does the Minister accept that it is now time to start a moratorium on magistrates court closures in rural areas?

Mr. Taylor: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that he must advance and develop those arguments in his own local area where there are, in fact, no proposed closures. The only body competent to propose a closure is the magistrates themselves through their committee. The only body competent to oppose a closure is the county council. Only if they are at odds does the Lord

Chancellor have any role. The hon. Gentleman should be lobbying his local magistrates and local county councillors.

Mr. McLoughlin: Can my hon. Friend assure me that the Lord Chancellor and his Department will consider carefully the question of rural services and the availability of courts when such proposals come before them? May I say that I am not too worried about people who must pay fines in magistrates courts, as the simple answer is that they should not get convicted in the first place?

Mr. Taylor: I take very much to heart what my hon. Friend says. The issues are weighed carefully, and I shall make sure that that continues. I might say also that we do open new courts as well as attend occasionally upon the closures of old ones.

Limitation Legislation

28. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to complete his review of limitation legislation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I informed the hon. Member in January that we were considering whether a comprehensive review of the law of limitation should be undertaken. The Lord Chancellor has now decided to invite the Law Commission to undertake such a review.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Does the Minister understand the concerns of a significant number of people whose lives have been ruined by childhood abuse—often sexual—over their inability to take action through the courts because of the existing limitation legislation? Does he realise that, by tomorrow, it will be exactly one year since he gave me an assurance in the House during Question Time that the review would be completed by the end of last year? Does he realise why it is that a number of people who have been directly affected feel that the Government are conspiring to prevent them from getting to court with their cases?

Mr. Taylor: I understand those concerns. Piecemeal reform in that part of the law has had its day, and we need a comprehensive review. The Lord Chancellor has called for such a review to take place as soon as possible.

Public Defender Service

29. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to establish a public defender service.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. That is not intended.

Mr. Mitchell: Given that the vicious curtailment in the coverage of legal aid and the inherent problems in dealing with that were pointed out last week by the National Audit Office and by the Public Accounts Committee, whose Chairman said that solicitors tend to

"regard the citizen's right to legal aid as their own right to a blank cheque",

would it not be sensible, save more money and bring justice to the great majority of our people if we established a public defender service to deal with criminal cases and if we financed a proper network of law centres to deal with civil cases? Would that not bring the power of the courts of justice to the great mass of people in a way that we are not doing now?

Mr. Taylor: I am very much in favour—as, I think, is the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng)—of involving within the legal aid system citizens advice bureaux and law centres. That is a very good idea. I am no more sanguine than the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) about abuse of the green form scheme. We need the tightest possible controls to ensure that the system, which is intended to help people have access to justice, is used properly.

With regard to a public defender system, it is my experience that one of the best operations in the legal aid system is the courts' duty solicitor scheme, which seems to work well in practice. The idea of a public defender service has been canvassed from time to time, and the hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the idea was canvassed in New Zealand, but rejected.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the interests of justice—with particular regard to defendants—would be best served by having independent solicitors and independent barristers as defenders, as they would be practitioners serving no interest other than those of their client and the courts?

Mr. Taylor: The policy of the Government is that publicly funded legal services should be provided—in the main—through the independent private professions.

Mr. Jessel: In considering the future funding of legal aid, will my hon. Friend make certain that the Government do not attach excessive weight to the views of the two legal professions?

Mr. Taylor: I feel sure that we shall get to know those views, but the Lord Chancellor has a wider duty than to the legal professions. We shall look with the greatest possible care at the way in which legal aid is funded, and we shall ensure that the interests of the litigant and the defendant are foremost.

WALES

David Lloyd George

17. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider an official commemoration of the 50th anniversary of David Lloyd George's death on 26 March 1995.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No.

Mr. Hughes: That is a disgrace. May I ask the Minister in all seriousness, to think again? It is unacceptable, not just to people in Wales but to those throughout the UK, that probably the greatest Welsh parliamentarian this century is not being officially recognised 50 years after his death. I ask the Minister not to give such a short and ill-considered response, but to take the idea away, think about it and consider whether it might not bring even his side some benefit.

Mr. Jones: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it was not an ill-considered response. I acknowledge that Lloyd George was a great parliamentarian, albeit only a Liberal, but many others have an equal or greater

claim. The Government have no plans to introduce additional permanent bank holidays in any part of the United Kingdom because of the cost and disruption to business.

Unemployment

18. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales who are unemployed (i) have been unemployed for a year or more and (ii) are aged 25 years and under.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In January 1995, 39,700 persons in Wales had been on the claimant unemployment count for over one year. The number aged under 25 on the claimant count was 35,500.

Mr. Barry Jones: What a great disgrace. Ministers should tackle the problem urgently. Is the Minister aware that, in my constituency, 1,500 unemployed people are either under the age of 25 or have been out of work for more than one year? What policy changes will he introduce? What hope will he give to those of our people who are unemployed?

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I do not need to introduce any new policies because we already have the right policies, as has been shown as recently as in the Cambridge *Econometric Theory* survey of last week, which predicted that Wales would be the fastest-growing part of the United Kingdom economy during 1995. The hon. Gentleman ought to wake up to the real world.

EU-Canada Fishing Dispute

3.30 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney) (*by private notice*) asked the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the dispute over fishing rights between the European Union and Canada.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): At the heart of this dispute is a disagreement between Canada and the European Union over the division of an agreed catch quota of 27,000 tonnes of Greenland halibut in the waters regulated by the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation outside the Canadian 200-mile limit. That quota was set for the first time for this fishery in NAFO last September. The European Union expected a share of the total allowable catch proportionate to its track record which, in the most recent three-year period, represented 75 per cent. of the catch, while Canadian vessels took less than 14 per cent. At a NAFO meeting in February this year, Canada did not agree and advanced an alternative distribution which would have given it 60 per cent. of the TAC and the EU 12 per cent. The EU felt that this was neither fair nor just and decided unanimously to invoke the objection procedure which is provided for in NAFO rules.

Having invoked the procedure, the EU was entitled to take its preferred share of the 27,000 tonne TAC. Canada disputed the EU's use of the objection procedure, took national powers to act against EU vessels fishing outside its 200-mile limit and warned the EU that it would use those powers if the EU vessels did not leave the fishery. On Thursday last, Canada used its legislation to arrest a Spanish vessel on the high seas.

The United Kingdom has no fishing vessels in the disputed fishery and is not directly involved. However, we are actively encouraging the intense diplomatic efforts which are now taking place with a view to reducing the tension and getting negotiations restarted.

Mr. Shore: I am grateful to the Minister for that statement. He is, of course, aware that only five years ago the European Union catch was about 2,000 tonnes in the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation area and that that has now increased to more than 82,000 tonnes. I do not think that the Minister will dispute the fact that when it comes to reputation for overfishing, few countries have a worse record than Spain.

Having said that, may I draw the Minister's attention to the most shocking part of the whole episode? I refer to the hostile, bellicose language used by the spokesmen of the European Union, in particular Commissioner Bonino, who described the Canadian action as an act of organised piracy, other Commission spokesmen who have talked about a range of sanctions being considered against Canada, and, worst of all, the agreement of the ambassadors to the European Union to a statement that includes these words:

> "The European Union and its member states are forced to reassess their relationship with Canada in the light of this deplorable situation and reserve their rights to take any action which they deem appropriate."

Let us be quite clear about the British Government's attitude to the European Union taking any action which it deems expedient, in the knowledge that the Spanish Government have already sent a gunboat to the area. Are we going to find the British Navy lined up with the Spanish navy to drive out the Canadians?

Is the Minister aware how deeply offensive this whole procedure is, especially aimed against Canada, a country that has an unrivalled record in international good behaviour in so many areas, which is a fellow member of NATO, a senior member of the Commonwealth and happens to share the same sovereign as this country?

Mr. Jack: The right hon. Gentleman speaks, rightly, with passion about a very serious matter that has occurred on the high seas. As someone who has had to deal from the Dispatch Box on many occasions with strongly and deeply felt views in the House about the actions of Spanish fishing vessels, I think that we would all have some sympathy with the emotions that stir in the breasts of those Canadians who wish to defend what they deem to be their legitimate fishing interests. As we saw to the cost of our fishermen only last summer, when member states within the European Union, or anyone else, take precipitate action on the high seas to solve matters, it goes nowhere near the heart of the issue.

The right hon. Member mentioned NATO. With quiet respect, may I point out that Spain is also a member of NATO. This matter requires quiet diplomacy on our part. I became aware of the Canadian displeasure about the matter some time ago, and I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have done our best behind the scenes to urge on all parties concerned the need to negotiate a way round a problem that has occurred in a wholly legitimate international body, which Canada has been perfectly happy to operate within until now. When previous NAFO regulations were set, Canada respected them, just as, for example, the moratorium on the cod fishery off Newfoundland has always been respected by European Union countries fishing in that area.

On the right hon. Gentleman's point about conservation, the purpose of setting the total allowable catch at 27,000 tonnes was to reduce very substantially the amount of fish being taken in that fishery. Again, there was no dispute between Canada and the European Union on the need for that action.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As Canada is a friendly Commonwealth country, which has never let us down when we have been in trouble, and as the fishermen of Canada feel absolutely sickened that their fish stocks have been destroyed year after year by Spanish vessels using the vacuum refrigerator system, which destroys all stocks, will the Minister give the House one simple assurance—that the Government will do nothing about trade sanctions or anything else until they have come back to the House and asked for our permission? Does he accept the simple point that the figure that he quoted is basically a distortion, bearing in mind the fact that the Spanish catch has increased enormously in recent years?

Mr. Jack: What is not at issue, in terms of a distortion, is the fact that Canada and the European Union had agreed a much lower total allowable catch for that fishery to try to reduce the total amount of fishing. My hon. Friend is pressing me on statements made by Commissioners, as did the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). I assure him that, in my view and that of my right hon. Friend the Minister, the best way to serve the interests of Canada and the European Union is to press

[Mr. Jack]

for the matter to be settled by negotiation. Gunboat diplomacy on the high seas—whoever undertakes it—does not remove the underlying problems of the worldwide difficulties of shortages and pressure on fish stocks.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Has the Minister made it clear to his Spanish opposite numbers that, in the House and the country, we would have more sympathy with the Spanish position if their Government had taken immediate action following the Bay of Biscay incidents last summer in which Cornish fishermen were subjected to Spanish acts of piracy? Do the Spanish Government now accept that all negotiations must take place within the European Union and that they must take no unilateral action? If not, quiet diplomacy will go out of the window and we shall have a major conflagration off the coast of Newfoundland in the next few weeks.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members should know that we have expressed our great concern over the practices of Spain at the Fisheries Council, and I did so again when I met the new Fisheries Commissioner, Mrs. Bonino, last week. I impressed upon her the need for mechanisms to be put in place well before the summer tuna fishery commences, to ensure that we talk through any remaining points of difference and that people do not try to settle fisheries disputes by means of precipitate action on the high seas. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Spain's past activities may have influenced Canada's view today, and it is hardly surprising that Canada is taking such a robust stance.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): As someone who has fought the Spanish over their fishing methods, particularly off the south-west coast of England, for 15 years, may I assure my hon. Friend that the sympathies of every fisherman in the south-west are with the Canadians? But does he agree that those disputes must be settled in accordance with international law? Are not we in great danger, because if, for some reason, Canada pursues its action in breach of international law, it will play into the hands of Spain, which might say next summer, when our fishermen are down there fishing for tuna, "Ah, we have the right, according to Canadian precedent, to arrest Cornish fishing boats off our tuna fishery". The issue is not as black and white as some hon. Members try to make out.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend speaks with a great deal of knowledge and wisdom. He has fought tirelessly for the interests of his fishermen under the threat of, and sometimes proven, breaking of rules by Spanish fishermen. He is absolutely right to point again at the parallel between this matter and the tuna fishery. He will recall that the disputes last summer took place in international waters. Against the background of pressure on the world's fish stocks, it is vital that disputes should be resolved not on the high seas but around the conference table.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Why did we concur in the statement about sanctions? Is any EC finance or British contribution involved in sending a Spanish navy vessel into that area? What conceivable interest to do we have in defending the depredation of those Spanish pirates of the fishing grounds? Is it correct that that vessel dropped its gear overboard, which is a sure sign that the mesh used was illegal and that it was catching too small fish before the arrest? Finally, why do not we give Spain the same sterling support as Spain, the European Union and individual European countries gave us in our dispute with Iceland in the 1970s?

Mr. Jack: Far be it from me to say that the hon. Gentleman is involved in an exercise of "All our Yesterdays". I know that this is a serious issue for Humberside fishermen and the hon. Gentleman and I are in regular correspondence about aspects of that matter. He asked me a number of questions. On statements being made by European Commissioners, given Canada's robust stance, I counsel the hon. Gentleman, for his own interest, to read the statements of Minister Tobin on that and he will see that they are in robust terms. It is hardly surprising that an Italian Commissioner supporting a Spanish stance speaks in fairly inflammatory language. That is how those things occur.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are not funding the Spanish navy in that exercise. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the attempts, according to newspaper reports—those matters are as yet unproven—that the vessel concerned, the Estai, ditched its gear. The hon. Gentleman and I have exchanged concerns about undersize fishing by Spanish vessels in our waters, and the elements involved in this matter will strike a chord with our fishermen. But just as I chose last week to make it robustly clear to the new Fisheries Commissioner that, unless people are prepared to play by the rules, there will be no credibility in matters such as the common fisheries policy, it is equally important that rules that require negotiation around the table are adhered to.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the problem goes beyond the plundering of fish stocks by Spain? Does he agree that climate change, the reduction of plankton and the move of the capelin to the south mean that fish stocks have moved south, too, and that the activities of the so-called animal rights lobby have stopped the seal cull? When we talk about Canada, which we should support robustly, we should not forget Newfoundland, a large part of whose economy is dependent on fishing.

To take up the question of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), what about fish net sizes? We have heard on several occasions that the Spanish are using a mesh that is smaller than that which they are entitled to use under international law.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is right to underline the worldwide problems of pressure on fishing stocks. He will be aware of the recent report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. He will be aware also of Sir Crispin Tickell's report on sustainable development. Both he and the UN point to the tremendous pressure on fish stocks. Part of the reason for that is that modern technology has given man, the catcher, a significant advantage over the hunted, the fish. Everyone who is responsible for fishing policy has some difficult issues to take up on behalf of his or her fishing industry in the context of long-term conservation of fishing stocks.

Fishermen are proud people with a long tradition. They want the freedom to fish, and politicians with fishing responsibility have long-term conservation in mind. It was

profoundly worrying to witness what happened to the Newfoundland stock. Canada and other nations fishing in the area ignored the signs and continued fishing. In the end the fishery was closed.

I spoke to the Commissioner last week about net sizes in the context of the accession arrangements for Spain and Portugal which deal with the development of technical conservation measures. I assure my hon. Friend that discussions are in progress.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the Minister aware that it was a great pleasure for some of us to hear Ministers speaking up in defence of their fishing fleets in robust terms? Is it not a disgrace that, on Commonwealth day, the House is not prepared to say openly that we are sick of the way in which the Spanish have consistently broken the rules? We should make it clear at all suitable forums that we intend to support the Canadians.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Lady may have forgotten a point of recent history, when the United Kingdom went out of its way to be as supportive to Canada as possible in Canada's wish to have a European Union-Canada fishing agreement. We have done as much as any member of the EU, and probably more, to support our Canadian friends in these important matters. Canada, however, would respect in every way the upholding of the principles of law. As my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) said—he speaks with telling experience, having had to deal with these matters on behalf of the fishermen in his constituency—we must uphold the rule of law and settle these matters not by precipitate action on the high seas but by discussion. The House should respect what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): To take up the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir. T. Taylor), will my hon. Friend make absolutely certain that the British Government will give no comfort to the European Union in respect of the matters that are being discussed and the allegations that are being made? At the end of the day, the Newfoundlanders depend so much on fishing for their livelihoods, jobs and futures. We must take a stand to look after those who looked after us in the past.

Mr. Jack: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman speaks strongly about defending the interests of Newfoundland and its fishermen. He may have missed my answer in which I observed that, within NAFO, for the first time Canada and the other participating countries agreed to the 27,000-tonne total allowable catch for the species, in order substantially to reduce—by over 50 per cent.—the amount of fish being taken in the long-term interests of all concerned. That is an important point if we are looking at preserving the interests of Canada and its fishing agreement. As for the European Union, it is important that members who are the contracting parties, and the fishermen concerned, stick to the rules of that fishery and reduce the amount of fishing, in accordance with the total allowable catch that has been declared.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): As a representative of a fishing community, I must advise the Minister that the charge laid by Commissioner Bonino of organised piracy against the Canadians is seen by fishermen as being much more applicable to the Spaniards themselves, because we know that they break the rules and that they fly close to the wind on many occasions. They have ruined the west African fisheries and now seem prepared to ruin the Canadian fisheries. Indeed, they are poised to do exactly the same here at home.

I ask the Minister simply which European Union states have fished the quota of 3,500 tonnes that was allocated to the European Union? Has the quota been broken? Will he now stop talking about playing by the rules, and guarantee our fishermen a surveillance and policing policy, which will mean that the industry of our fishermen, who are fighting for their lives, will be protected rather than sold out to the Spaniards?

Mr. Jack: I am happy to debate with the hon. Lady—either formally across the Dispatch Box, or informally—what we are going to do about enforcement under the new arrangement for Spain and Portugal. I agree entirely that it is central to those rules being seen to work. There are policing arrangements and the activities of Spain and Portugal were subjected to a ruthless inquisition at the end of last year, which resulted in a number of Spanish vessels being prosecuted for breaking some of the rules of that fishery. So the question of playing by the rules has been dealt with.

The hon. Lady touched on the central issue: the maintenance of the law and the agreements that surround that particular fishery. It is no use trying to settle the matter by other methods. She asked which member countries had been fishing. Spain and Portugal are the two principal interests in the matter, but countries such as Japan, Russia, Canada—obviously—Poland and others are also involved in that fishery. I point out to the hon. Lady that, in the totality of the fishery, which includes the waters within Canada's 200-mile economic zone, the European Union is the only contracting party to the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation to be expressly forbidden from going into Canadian waters.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is not the problem substantially one of our own making? If only all the various nations concerned were to repatriate the part of their sovereignty that they have surrendered to international organisations, and if only they allowed the untrammelled free market to operate, within a year there would be no fish stocks and therefore no problem.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend has just initiated his own doomsday scenario on the fishing industry. Governments have a responsibility to work to help to conserve fish stocks for, effectively, the world's long-term interests. I must point out quietly to my hon. Friend that the dispute is about international waters, so there could be no question of repatriating international waters.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): If the Minister is unable to support Canada, which is taking the boat to court, will he at least make a clear statement opposing the decision by the Spanish Government to send two warships to the site? If there was a common defence policy in Europe, would Britain be required to contribute warships to deal with incidents of that sort against Canada in future?

Mr. Jack: The Spanish Government have, on a matter that they see as a threat to Spanish vessels in international waters, taken action to defend the interests of their fishermen. As I said to the right hon. Member for Bethnal

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Green and Stepney, we do not have any fishing vessels in that fishery and it is not directly a matter of concern to United Kingdom fishing interests. I have given a view—very clearly, I hope—that the idea of using any kind of naval presence to solve the problem is not the way forward, and I return to what I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who gave us an extremely good set of reasons why talk rather than precipitate action on the high seas is the right way forward.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government are willing to support the majority decisions of the 15 members of the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation? If that is the case, will he undertake to tell the EC Fisheries Commissioner as much?

Mr. Jack: There has not been a decision of quite the kind suggested by my hon. Friend. I think that Commissioner Bonino is entirely aware of the position surrounding the arrangement of the quota.

Let us look at the history. Last September, Canada, the European Union and all other contracting parties agreed on the much lower quota of 27,000 tonnes. There was no disagreement. The disagreement concerns how that quota—which was set for the very first time—should be allocated to those who have traditionally fished the waters involved.

In normal circumstances, the track record of those fishing in the area would be expected to be the determinant. Canada, however, did not like the outcome of that exercise, and sought to disagree with it. Rather than having about three quarters of the fishery, the European Union was offered 12 per cent.; Canada then turned the numbers around, giving herself and others a substantial increase. Within that argument, however, the 27,000-tonne figure has not changed.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister answer the question asked earlier by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), which he studiously avoided answering then? Will he state clearly that Britain will not support sanctions against Canada, or any attempts within the Community to bring about Community sanctions against it?

Mr. Jack: The European Union, which is currently engaged in discussions with Canada to try to resolve the problems, is clearly working hard in an attempt to secure round-table discussions about the point at issue, which is the allocation of stock. It is hardly surprising that, at a time when strong statements are being made, a range of options should be outlined; but our advice to all concerned is to get round the table and hold a proper discussion about the legitimate way in which the stock should be allocated.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Would I be right in interpreting my hon. Friend's comments to mean that the British Government are at arm's length from what the European Community has been saying and doing? I am sure that the British people will have little sympathy with the predatory fishing practices of Spanish fishermen, and a great deal of sympathy with the conservation policies of the Canadian Government.

Mr. Jack: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's latter point. Only last week, I robustly made it clear to the Commissioner that unless our industry could be convinced that Spain would stick to the rules, the credibility of the arrangements for Spain and Portugal's full accession to the common fisheries policy would be at risk. I told the Commissioner that I could see our fishermen turning against the arrangements, and stressed that there was strong public opinion about the matter.

Let me leave my hon. Friend in no doubt: the Commissioner knows how strongly we feel. The dispute, however, is between the European Union and Canada. The European Union, on behalf of its membership, entered into an agreement with Canada about the total allowable halibut catch; the share-out is a matter of dispute. We have been working almost tirelessly behind the scenes, trying to get people to stop making inflammatory statements and get round the table again to negotiate on the hard facts relating to the fishery. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall draw the strong views expressed this afternoon to the attention of the negotiators.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Does the Minister accept that a little partiality towards our Commonwealth friends would not go amiss? Many of us were very unhappy about our entry into the European Community because we felt that we were betraying the Commonwealth, our history and, in many cases, family and friends. When we hear a European Commissioner use thuggish language and extrapolate far beyond the present position, many of us feel that we do not want the European Community to take further action or to impose sanctions on Canada. We want a clear statement from the Minister that the Government will not support such action either.

Mr. Jack: As I told the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), we have in the past given every support to our Canadian friends and we certainly do so at present. We meet them regularly. We were one of the main advocates in the European Union of a European Union-Canada fishing agreement. We have certainly tried behind the scenes, as part of the general briefing for European negotiators, to make it clear that talk rather than precipitate action on the high seas is the right way forward. However, at the end of the day, the European Union has the responsibility to settle the dispute because it is between Canada and the European Union.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): My hon. Friend chose to make his statement while the Commonwealth day festival is proceeding. Surely the Canadians are dealing with the Spanish fleet by using the best time-honoured and traditional practices. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not in international waters."] If we are given the choice between supporting our kith and kin in Canada or our so-called fellow Euro-citizens, should not we choose the former every time?

Mr. Jack: We all have a great deal of sympathy for our many friends in Canada. That is why we have gone out of our way to be helpful to Canada in her relations with the European Union. This matter is about the actions of one country in terms of a fisheries dispute on the high

seas. There must be respect by all contracting parties for the law that is involved in this action. To pick and choose who to support in any one dispute would simply encourage other people, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives said, to take the law into their own hands. When the world's fish stocks are under pressure, that is no way to try to resolve these difficult matters.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Irrespective of any individual or corporate sympathies in the House, does the Minister agree that so far this matter has been dealt with by a Commissioner who is accountable only for her interpretation of treaties and agreements? It has not been a matter for the President or members of the Fisheries Council. The Minister says that this is a European Union dispute with Canada. That illustrates the fact that, in this matter, the Union is acting more like a unitary state than any federation or association of states.

Mr. Jack: In his usual way the hon. Gentleman points at me and seeks to build an edifice where there is no need for one. At this stage it is a matter of trying to reconvene negotiations within agreed mechanisms. There will be an opportunity in April, if the matter is still current, for the Fisheries Council to debate it and question the Commissioner, if necessary, on the action.

Mr. Spearing: Big deal.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman says, "Big deal". That is typical. When the mechanisms do not suit him he shoots them down and when they do suit him he takes them up. We are in discussions with our European Union partners through various committees under the standing procedures of the European Union to ensure that the EU maintains the stance of trying to recommence negotiations with Canada on this matter. If further action is needed there will be an opportunity at the April Fisheries Council meeting to discuss the issues.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Does not this go to the heart of all the problems with Europe? The Minister said several times that we have to obey the rules and have law and order and so on. He even said that he had impressed on the new Commissioner that the credibility of the common fisheries policy was at issue. Does he honestly believe that these marauding Spanish trawlers are remotely interested in the credibility of that policy? They are not. They will go where they can and fish any stocks that they can, to the damage of those stocks and fishing industries all over the world. Against that background is it any wonder that a nation takes a robust stance?

My hon. Friend can gauge the feeling in the House. I put to him again the question that he has been asked several times. Will he give us his categorical assurance that this country will not put its hand to any measures against Canada on this issue until he comes back to the House?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Jack: I shall do my best to answer the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and others. Let me deal first and with courtesy with my hon. Friend's questions. For the record I should point out to him that, at the Fisheries Council in December, Spain tried to increase the total allowable catch from 27,000 tonnes to 40,000 tonnes, praying in aid the argument that fisheries scientists say that the TAC for this species should not be set at an amount greater than 40,000 tonnes. No country in the Council, with the exception of Portugal, gave Spain any comfort on that matter. The Council respected the fact that the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation had set a total allowable catch of 27,000 tonnes for good reasons that were in the long-term interests of all who fish the stock, including Canada's fishermen. The Council thus offered important recognition of the value of the scientific advice.

My hon. Friend went on to raise other issues. He may like to question these mechanisms, but what would happen if there were a free-for-all without them? People would quickly take all the fish; the stocks would be plundered and there would be none left for anyone.

My hon. Friend presses me, as other hon. Members have done, about future action in respect of the European Union. It is not for me, as Fisheries Minister, to deal with that aspect. I shall certainly draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary the strength of feeling in the House on the matter. My task is to reach a position where we need not contemplate such action. The way to do that is to get round the table and talk about the issue.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Despite the existence of international law and the agreements that the Minister mentioned, will he comment on the fact that stocks of halibut and other fished species continue to decline dramatically, thus threatening the economic health of Newfoundland and eastern Canada? Will the hon. Gentleman also consider the fact that some of us may have real doubts about the legality of Spanish fishing methods and about the total catch that the Spanish take? I refer in particular to those of us with steel works in our constituencies who have seen Spain operate improperly in that industry.

Will the Minister also remind our people in Brussels that, at the time of the Gulf war, the Spanish contribution appears to have been a great deal smaller than has been their response to the Canadian action in this case?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman's question takes me somewhat wider than the fishing industry. The important point to bear in mind is that this is all about the conservation of fish stocks. Canada herself was a party to the ultimate fishing out of the stocks, which in turn led to the Newfoundland fishery being closed. That has worried fishing interests in Canada so much that they have urged their Government to take a very strong stand on this matter. It is not as if Canada's views were ignored when it came to taking a stand on it. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the catch quota in that fishery had been substantially reduced to the lower figure of 27,000 tonnes in response to the very line of argument that the hon. Gentleman has advanced. The whole idea was to restrict the amount of fishing, in the long-term interests of preserving stocks of Greenland halibut, for the benefit of Canada's fishermen and of all other contracting parties to the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): While all the sympathies of the House must be with our cousins in Canada, should not our sympathies also lie with upholding international law—since the Conservative party believes in upholding laws? In that regard, have not our cousins in Canada unfortunately broken international law by unilaterally claiming to have jurisdiction over the high

[Mr. Hartley Booth]

seas? Is it not right, therefore, of the Minister to continue his negotiations to get Canada off the hook of having broken international law?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend, with his legal knowledge, presents a correct interpretation. It is important to remember that the negotiations are being conducted on behalf of the contracting parties in Europe by the European Union. Canada adapted her domestic law to legitimise, in her eyes, her action outside the 200-mile economic zone. That is the point at issue. She has now arrested a Spanish fishing vessel—but none of that goes to the heart of the matter. The total allowable catch was agreed by all parties. The way to resolve this matter is, as my hon. Friend says, to get back round the table and agree on a sensible distribution of the stock.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My hon. Friend said that the matter should be resolved around the table and diplomatically. If so, should not Spain instantly stop all fishing in this disputed part of the sea until those diplomatic processes have taken place?

Mr. Jack: My last reading of reports about what is happening in the fishery has shown that Spanish vessels have effectively ceased fishing and removed themselves to an area that is known as the Flemish cap, where they await developments.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): As someone who is not noted for his Euro-scepticism, may I ask the Minister to answer a question that he has dodged seven times? Will he urge on the Foreign Secretary that he abjure the use of sanctions against Canada?

Mr. Jack: I think I gave an answer to that question earlier when I said that I would alert my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the concerns that had been expressed about that aspect of the European Union's communications with Canada, but equally I said that, before we went down any of those precipitate roads, we wanted to see the European Union and Canada meeting round the table to discuss the matter. That is a far easier way of dealing with the matter than simply pushing parties apart. The solution lies in bringing parties together.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Does the Minister accept that the fundamental issue is the need to conserve fish stocks, bearing in mind the fact that total allowable catches and quotas are part of that, as are the fishing methods of vessels and fishermen? As Canada experienced the virtual wipeout of Canadian Atlantic cod stock, should we not approach the issue with some understanding of the considerations that have led the Canadian Government to take this action? Does the Minister appreciate that the breakdown of the talks within the framework of the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation has been the immediate precursor to the problem and that the talks should not be left like that? Can those discussions be reopened with a view to reaching agreement on the European Union quota because, obviously, that is what is in dispute?

The incident in the Atlantic is an example of a wider problem: the inadequacy of the international arrangements, which are unable effectively to conserve stocks outwith national limits. Should we deal with that by extending national limits, or should the Minister consider securing, presumably through the framework of the United Nations, some arbitration procedure or method of help to achieve effective conservation and enforcement of actions outwith national limits?

Mr. Jack: I thought that I had answered most of those questions, but, at the risk of repeating myself, I shall try to do my best. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the fundamental issue was fish stocks and conservation. The short answer is, yes, that is the fundamental issue. That is why NAFO took the decision last September to introduce a total allowable catch of 27,000 tonnes on a fishery that, as he knows, has never been subject to any quota arrangements. It did that to conserve the stock for the long-term future. On fishing methods, he will know that rules exist on mesh size. As I said earlier in relation to the people who have broken those rules, after an exhaustive investigation by flag states and our European Union partners, action has already been taken to prosecute Spanish vessels for rule breaking.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Canadian cod stock. I quietly say to him that Canada was also involved in fishing that area and that all the people who fished in it contributed to the decline and eventual decimation of that stock. All parties, including the European Union fishing nations, respected the moratorium on the fishing of cod in that area. The hon. Gentleman asked whether talks can be resumed. That is exactly what people are trying hard to achieve at this moment, to ensure that the talks can be resurrected. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are giving the European Union every encouragement that we can. The hon. Gentleman asked also whether international waters can be extended but did not hint at his own views.

Dr. Strang: I will be pleased to tell the Minister.

Mr. Jack: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to answer him. Any fishing nation that sought to go beyond a 200-mile limit would simply find a worldwide tit-for-tat arrangement that would not serve any interests because ultimately there would have to be continuing agreement on areas not covered by exclusive economic zones. The United Nations standing conference on the law of the seas exists to deal with disputes, and organisations such as NAFO exist to reach sensible conclusions—and we are trying to encourage that in this dispute.

Points of Order

4.15 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have read at the weekend of the decision by Cambridge health authority not to fund treatment of a seriously ill 10-year-old girl suffering from leukaemia. That case has caused great concern among my constituents and the general public. One reason given for refusing treatment was that the substantial expenditure combined with limited prospects for success would not be an effective use of resources. The Secretary of State for Health has been making pronouncements on radio. Has she said whether she will come to the House to address that worrying and serious matter?

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) rising in her place. Does she wish to raise a point of order on the same matter?

Mrs. Campbell: No, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: In that case, I will deal with the first point of order. I have not received any indication from a Minister that he or she will seek to make a statement on the matter raised by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) or any other matter today.

Mrs. Campbell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your advice about an announcement that the Prime Minister recently made in the House. In response to a question from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Gentleman assured the House that pay excesses among bosses of privatised utilities had gone too far and that he intended to deal with the matter by establishing the Greenbury committee, which would make recommendations to the Government on ways of preventing excessive pay. However, the front page of one newspaper today suggests that the Prime Minister has told a group of business men that the Greenbury committee will not make major recommendations and that the only recommendations expected are minor changes to company law. Do you, Madam Speaker, consider that the Prime Minister seriously misled the House about his true intentions?

Madam Speaker: No, I certainly do not. The hon. Lady knows that all Ministers are responsible for their comments. If the hon. Lady or any other hon. Member wants to pursue that matter further with Ministers, they can do so in Prime Minister's Questions and in other ways.

Orders of the Day

Gas Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

[Relevant documents: The First Report from the Trade and Industry Committee of Session 1994-95 on The Domestic Gas Market (House of Commons Paper No. 23), the Second Special Report from the Trade and Industry Committee of Session 1994-95, containing the Government's Observations thereon (House of Commons Paper No. 291) and Minutes of Evidence taken before the Environment Committee on 15th and 21st February 1995 (House of Commons Paper No. 229-i and -ii of Session 1994-95).]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.18 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The assumption that the supply of gas to the public can best be undertaken on a monopoly basis dates from 1847, when a committee of inquiry led to the passing of the first Gasworks Clauses Act. The conclusion that monopoly was the necessary form of organisation was based on the poor economics of laying competing pipelines and the associated disruption in terms of street works that that was found to entail.

The idea of separating the trading functions from the operation of the distribution pipes has emerged progressively over the past few years. We have an active competitive market in the supply of gas to industrial and commercial customers. These customers have already seen savings of 10 per cent. to 15 per cent. or more as a result of that competition.

The Bill provides a sound foundation for the phased introduction of the benefits of competition to the 18 million domestic gas customers in Great Britain. The Bill will empower customers to demand the levels of service that they want. It will provide a powerful incentive to innovation and efficiency, and it will provide a strong downward pressure on average prices. Already since privatisation, we have seen a fall in the price of gas before VAT of more than 20 per cent. in real terms and an even larger fall in the standing charge. Alongside that, British Gas has invested £9 billion in the United Kingdom since 1986, including a £2 billion programme of mains replacement to improve safety.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The President of the Board of Trade used the word "average". Can he illuminate that—*[Interruption.]* I do not think that the Minister for Energy and Industry needs to tell the right hon. Gentleman the answer. He does not need help in that way. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what will happen to low-use consumers of gas? Will their bills go up substantially, as is being argued?

Mr. Heseltine: I can try to help the hon. Gentleman. "Average" is a complicated idea. One has to take the lowest prices and the highest prices, put them all together and divide them by the number of consumers. Out of that

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calculation comes what we customarily called, when I was at school, an average. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has noticed that I did not need to refer to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry for that remarkable piece of memory of my childhood years.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I do not want to challenge the right hon. Gentleman on the definition of "average". He will be aware of the danger that a person walking through a river with an average depth of 4 ft 6 in may drown in the middle. Is he not aware of the danger, within the average charges, to rural areas? If charges are required to reflect the costs of the supply of gas, the charges in rural areas may increase disproportionately, albeit within the average, which will hit some people hard.

Mr. Heseltine: As the hon. Gentleman will know, it has been suggested that because of the transportation charge, there may be a differential of between plus and minus 2 per cent., depending on the area. That has to be set against the forecasts of the companies anxious to enter the market. They can see economies of up to 10 per cent. in overall prices. Those matters will be dealt with considerably in the licences that the regulator will issue. The details of the licences will appropriately be explored in Committee, if the Bill receives a Second Reading.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Is not the key point that over the past 20 or 30 years, gas has expanded from covering 7 per cent. of households to about 50 per cent.? Many people in rural areas wish that gas could reach them. If the transportation variation is so small compared with the rest—except when oil prices are very low—most people will be glad that gas has been extended to more people.

Mr. Heseltine: That is absolutely right. That is why my hon. Friend will have welcomed the figure that I gave for investment by British Gas in widening and modernising its facilities; that investment amounts to £9 billion since 1986. That money has been obtained without recourse to the public purse because it has been raised in the private market.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Can the right hon. Gentleman enlighten the House on how he believes that the Bill will proceed in terms of the transportation charge? First, there is the geographical point, which he explained to the House. Secondly, there is the variable and the fixed part of the gas charge which, as he probably realises, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry brought to the attention of the House. Can the right hon. Gentleman give the House any assurances that the average price for TransCo was at the lower end? Both the right hon. Gentleman and the regulator accept the figure of £15. Can he give assurances that the cross-subsidy, which is now built into the price, will continue and that it will not be removed in the near future?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman puts the case very fairly, in asking about the £15 standard charge that is built into the proposals. That matter is subject in the end to the regulatory regime, but obviously there would be no point in changing the regime shortly after it had been introduced. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by the answer that I have given.

In formulating our proposals, we have been careful to ensure that safety will remain a top priority. We asked the Health and Safety Commission for a detailed report on our proposals. That report was published last week and we have accepted it.

It is central to our proposals that every supplier will have an obligation to supply on request any domestic customer covered by its licence. It will charge for gas against publicly available price schedules. There will be a number of measures to discourage cherry picking of the more attractive customers and rules to deal with price discrimination by nationally or locally dominant suppliers. At the same time, market entrants will be allowed to choose pricing structures that meet consumers' needs. If some new suppliers wish to enter the market on the basis of a standing charge set at zero, as one has suggested that it may, we would not wish to stand in its way.

We shall ensure that the requirement for special services to pensioners, the disabled or the blind and to those who have genuine difficulties paying for their gas should continue. That includes important services such as the free gas safety check for pensioners or disabled people who live alone and the provision of a range of special controls and adaptors to help with the use of gas appliances. The current requirements for service in those areas will be maintained and, in some cases, enhanced. All suppliers will have to bear their share of the social obligations to those customers, but there will be arrangements in the licences for a levy to share the costs of those services in certain circumstances if they fall disproportionately on a particular supplier.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister referred to social obligations. Does he feel that the Government have any social obligation to the many Sids and Mrs. Sids who were beguiled by Government legislation, persuaded to buy shares in British Gas and who had not expected that, in the short time to which he referred a moment ago, such a dramatic change in their circumstances would be effected?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has made an important contribution, but is he quite sure that he has the right industry? We are talking about the gas industry this afternoon, not the electricity industry.

Mr. Hardy: Sid was gas.

Mr. Heseltine: I understand that. The complaints of his right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) are about the electricity industry, not the gas industry. If I may say so, it is a quite bizarre reversal of fortune for Labour Members to know that there are even things called shareholders, let alone to rise to their feet to defend them.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland) *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: I thought that the Labour party was interested in customers, consumers and the public. Indeed, the object of this legislation is to reduce prices for the people who buy the gas.

Dr. Cunningham: I am talking about this Bill. The Minister mentioned a levy on all providers. That is not in the Bill and the House has not yet had the advantage of seeing the licences, because they have not been published.

Is he telling the House, and is he giving a guarantee, that that matter is agreed between himself and the Director General of Gas Supply?

Mr. Heseltine: When the right hon. Gentleman gets into the detail of the Bill, he will find that the powers to impose a levy are in the legislation.

Dr. Cunningham: Who will decide?

Mr. Heseltine: From the licences around, the regulator would decide whether that was a necessary development. The power to levy a charge to ensure that those services are protected is in the legislation.

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, we understand that, but that was not really the point of question. The power is there, but is the right hon. Gentleman guaranteeing that it will be implemented, and is he guaranteeing that the director general will ensure that that power is used in the way that he suggests?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman can be absolutely sure that the Government's intention is to ensure that the services that we are talking about are protected for the benefit of those who depend on them. The power in the Bill therefore ensures that the opportunity to do that exists. If the regulator could find other ways of doing that through the licensing system, that would achieve the same ends. However, that is not in any way a substitute for our determination that those services should be maintained.

Dr. Cunningham: It is the case, then, that it is quite possible that the director general could ensure that those services continue by making their costs fall on the consumers concerned.

Mr. Heseltine: Not in a way that would act adversely against the Government's intentions in introducing this legislation. That is the point. The Government are determined to preserve the social implications of the legislation, and the powers to do that are there in the ability to levy in the way that I outlined. I do not in any way criticise the right hon. Member for Copeland for pressing me on the point, because it is important and it is one that the Standing Committee will want to consider when we get to the details. I wholly accept and welcome that as the point is very important.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): My right hon. Friend has just said that what we are seeing, or about to see, is a total revolution in the energy industry. Does he believe that one way to stop the scare stories that are being put about by Opposition Members to the effect that those on low income and the disabled will lose out, may be to guarantee to people—particularly during the transitional period—that the present British Gas standards are an absolute minimum and that that will be enshrined in a code of practice, which the regulator will have to follow in the legislation? Would not that shut up Opposition Members?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. However, without committing ourselves to a code of practice, the Government's intention is to ensure the outcome that my hon. Friend has drawn to the attention of the House: in other words, the standards of British Gas today are the minimum standards. How we ensure that that happens is an issue that we shall have to resolve in detail. However, it is irresponsible and unforgivable for the Opposition to suggest that somehow or other those minimum standards will not be maintained. They will be maintained.

Sir Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the scares being raised by the Labour party are very familiar to Conservative Members, because they were raised when we privatised British Telecom? At that time, Labour Members said in the House that all the telephone boxes would be closed after privatisation, but the outcome has been that there are 50 per cent. more telephone boxes and 96 per cent. of them are working.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend reminds us, if we needed reminding, that every piece of competition-enhancing or privatising legislation put through the House by this Government has been subjected to total misrepresentation, deliberately and cynically, by the Opposition parties in order to try to persuade us not to proceed. When we have proceeded, their forecasts have turned out to be misleading and worrying for the particular groups of people on behalf of whom Opposition Members claim to speak.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): What the Minister is saying about the maintenance of minimum standards and social responsibility is utter balderdash. Can he answer my question without reference to all the President's men beside him? If what he says is the case, why are there 60 fewer home service advisers to visit old people and disabled people, to advise them on the adaption of gas equipment? Without reference to all the President's men, can he tell me why those minimum standards are being reduced day by day?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is complaining about the existing situation. We are trying to introduce competition to improve the existing situation.

I have never been ashamed to turn to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry, to seek his guidance on a matter in respect of which he is a well-known authority. Usually we manage to reach an agreed view, which I then present at the Dispatch Box. That is very different from what we see happening in the Labour party, where leading spokesmen fight each other to get to the Dispatch Box to give the different views of the Labour party's current policy.

We have a bizarre situation in which the Labour party is largely absent from the debate this afternoon because it is now trying to agree its new policy on privatisation. We know perfectly well that when Labour Members have agreed, 53 per cent. will believe that they have won and 47 per cent. will believe that they have lost. If the Labour party ever came to power—which heaven forfend—half its members would sit on the Back Benches opposing the government in which they had been elected to serve. They would then talk to us about divisions in the Conservative party.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Can I bring my right hon. Friend back to the question of special interest groups? He will be aware of my special constituency

[Dr. Robert Spink]

interest in blind people. Can he confirm that blind people will still be provided with Braille controls by all gas suppliers?

Mr. Heseltine: I know of my hon. Friend's interest and I am pleased to be able to give him a simple answer, which is yes.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I have given way enough. We must maintain the high standard of the debate and keep to the intellectually coherent case that I wish to deploy without that case being knocked about by the roughnecks on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Spearing *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: I know that the hon. Gentleman speaks for those roughnecks, but if he will forgive me, I shall try to make some progress.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The President has the biggest neck.

Mr. Heseltine: I may have the biggest neck, but there are parts of the hon. Gentleman with which I cannot compete.

The Bill retains the duty to promote energy efficiency. It creates a new environmental duty, which would, for example, require the director general to take into account the environmental impact of losses in the gas transmission system. The licences will extend to all domestic supplies the current requirement on British Gas to produce energy efficiency services and advice.

Perhaps most important, we are sweeping away the requirement that gas can only be sold as a fuel. The Bill will allow gas to be sold as part of an energy package, including a more efficient boiler as well as the gas itself. Suppliers will be able to compete in selling warm houses and not simply in selling gas, and they will have every incentive to compete by offering such added-value services as well as competing on price.

Mr. Spearing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman's neck is still as rough as it was a moment ago, and I will not give way to him.

I believe that competition will provide a powerful dynamic for energy efficiency. I know that Labour Members have always taken a cynical view about that. They believe that the only way to promote energy efficiency is through public expenditure or levies on other consumers. But they have always scoffed at what a competitive market can achieve. They have always been proved wrong in the event.

The principal concept underlying the Bill is the division of the various components of the gas industry. In particular, the public gas supplier envisaged by the Gas Act 1986 is to become three separate types of entity.

The first is the public gas transporter, who operates the pipelines through which gas is delivered to premises. The Bill recognises that, at the level of local distribution, that remains a monopoly function. Accordingly, British Gas's prices for transportation services will remain closely regulated.

The second entity is the gas supplier, who will contract with the customer for a supply of gas and will be responsible for delivering the services that the customer requires.

The third entity is the gas shipper, who performs the specialised function of arranging with public gas transporters for the right amounts of gas to be put into pipelines—normally at the beach—and conveyed to premises. In effect, that is a wholesaling function. The Bill requires that public gas transporters are separate legal persons from suppliers or shippers. However, the Bill allows the supplier and shipper functions to be handled either by the same entity or separately so that companies can organise themselves to fit their expertise.

A memorandum giving details of the principal terms of the licences—to which Opposition Members have drawn the attention of the House—was placed in the Library last week. The legal drafts of the licences are being prepared and will be published as soon as they are ready. We will of course listen most carefully to the views of hon. Members, the industry and others with an interest as we move towards finalising those standard conditions.

The Bill's detailed provisions largely consist of amendments to the Gas Act 1986 to give effect to the new structure and to provide an appropriate system of licensing. Clauses 1 and 2 adapt the duties of the Secretary of State and the director to the new regulatory framework. Clauses 3 to 8 introduce the new licensing framework for the industry, appropriate to the introduction of full competition. Clauses 3 and 4 and schedule 1 make it a criminal offence, subject to exemptions, to act as a supplier, shipper or transporter without the appropriate licence.

Clause 5 sets out the licensing regime for public gas transporters. Clause 6 sets out the licensing regime for gas supply and gas shipping. Clause 7 provides for the scope of licence conditions and procedures for application. Clause 8 enables the Secretary of State to determine and publish standard licence conditions and provides for their incorporation in licences. The Bill includes a number of other clauses and schedules, which there will be an opportunity to consider in detail at a later stage.

This Bill brings to an end a 150-year period of monopoly in the gas industry. It provides for the change to take place carefully and with fully adequate safeguards, yet it will allow people in the pilot areas to start benefiting from competition from next April. No stronger confirmation could be seen of the popularity of our proposals than the widespread interest that has been shown by people and their elected representatives in participating in the pilot phases. The Bill sets out proposals that have been welcomed by British Gas, by independent suppliers and by the Gas Consumers Council.

Perhaps I can take the House just a little further back in history and deal with the views that the Labour party has expressed on the issue. As we listen to what the right hon. Member for Copeland says this afternoon, we ought to know the judgment, authority and quality of view that lie behind the Labour party's policies.

In 1985, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), who was then the Opposition spokesman, said:

"There is no evidence that the Bill will improve efficiency, provide a better service, produce cheaper gas or, least of all, create greater competition."

As the House knows, there have been significant reductions in the price of industrial and commercial gas. There has been a significant increase in competition. There is certainly improved efficiency and a wider service.

The next forecast that we were to hear came from the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). He told us that

"the 16 million British gas consumers can expect only one result—to pay increased gas prices, higher than the rate of inflation, for years to come."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 780-93.]

The whole House knows that there has been downward pressure on prices. The forecasts are that that will be intensified as a result of the Bill. The average annual gas bill for domestic consumers fell from £392 to £315 including VAT in 1994, in real terms. That is a fall of almost £77 per average domestic consumer.

So what happens? The Opposition forecast inaccurately at every stage. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said on 3 October 1994:

"The Labour party has no interest or intention in seeking to return British Gas to the public sector."

That is not altogether surprising, but it should be contrasted with a statement by the right hon. Member for Salford, East. He told us in 1985:

"We shall reacquire the assets, based on the policy of the Labour party conference."

The only conclusion is that Opposition Members got their judgments wrong and because their judgments were so wrong, they changed their policy. Now they know that they cannot possibly go back to the electorate with the policies that a few years ago they believed were absolutely essential. That is why the Labour party is in such turmoil on clause IV.

If one thinks that the Labour party's policy is some sort of muddle based on misjudgments about the gas industry, perhaps I may trespass on the House's time a little longer. When the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) led for the Opposition in opposing the Electricity Bill in 1988, he said:

"what is proposed today is not something radical, evolutionary and new, but something old-fashioned and failed."

Yet now he is flogging around the country trying to persuade his party that the things that we did in 1988 are so central to the economic fabric of society that they cannot be changed.

Just to illustrate the depth of knowledge that he brought to the subject, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield had to say:

"the idea that we will have an influx of power stations, all competing on the grid, is nonsense."

Yet I was at the Dispatch Box a year or so ago when the Labour party condemned us for the dash for gas, which produced precisely the range of power stations that the Leader of the Opposition forecast would not be produced.

The last forecast stands in line. It is from the right hon. Gentleman in the same debate in December 1988:

"In exchange for having no choice, we have the reality of higher prices."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 680-84.]

Yet everyone knows that the downward pressure on prices has continued throughout that time.

I took the liberty of looking once again at the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Copeland and his right hon. and hon. Friends. This is what Opposition Members will vote for tonight, if they get the chance. It says that the Bill

"is damaging to the interests of many sections of the population, including elderly people, those with low incomes and those living in South West England, Wales and other parts of the United Kingdom distant from beaching points".

That is clear. That is their opinion. I took the liberty of asking whether any representations had been made by local authorities to be the first experimental area to have the benefits of the competition that will do so much harm to the elderly, those on low incomes and those living in the south-west. After all, if this is so obvious, so important and so devastating for the people for whom hon. Members on both sides of the House have the utmost sympathy—this is going to be a good one—no authority would want to be an experimental area.

The Tories do not come out of this story as well as I would like, if the standard is the imposition of hardship on all those hard-luck cases. Only two Tory-controlled local authorities applied to be part of the first experiment. The Liberal party did rather better. It did 100 per cent. better than the Tories in trying to impose, in the language of the Labour party, hardship on all the most pressurised classes in society. Four Liberal local authorities wanted to be part of the first experiment.

I warned the right hon. Member for Copeland that there was trouble coming. What did we discover about the people who were going to damage the interests of many sections of the population, including elderly people and people on low incomes scattered all over the place? Who takes the prize for the number of local authorities that came to my Department and asked to help get the experiment in place? The right hon. Member for Copeland should stand up and be counted. Six Labour authorities, as opposed to four Liberal and two Tory authorities, applied to be part of the experiment. So which is the party that really cares? Which party is in the business of damaging the interests of elderly people and people on low incomes? It is the Labour party.

I say to the right hon. Member for Copeland and to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for goodness sake, if you can get away from the Chamber, go back to where clause IV is being drafted and check it against the amendment on the Order Paper today. The Labour party will have to do some pretty fast talking if all the forecasts for which it will vote tonight come right. The Labour party has campaigned most arduously.

We might ask a question or two about the Liberals. The Liberal party will undoubtedly vote for the Labour amendment, abstain or something— anything to keep out of the Government Lobby. That will be the Liberals' position, because they want to pretend that they are a distinctive party.

On 13 October 1994, the hon. Member for Gordon, who was the Liberal Treasury spokesman, sent a letter to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry. The hon. Gentleman has moved on. The great thing about being a Liberal spokesman is that one never stays in the job for long. One can abandon the position that the party

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has adopted one month, hand the job to someone else and disown it the next, in any part of the country. In that letter, he said:

"I am concerned to read that the Government may be unable to find sufficient space in the Parliamentary timetable to legislate for competition in the gas industry.

It is extremely important that the legislative framework for this is put in place as soon as possible".

So that there should be no doubt—even for people like myself who perhaps do not pay as much attention to the Liberals as we should—the letter continued:

"'i.e.' the next session in Parliament."

Even I could work out on 13 October 1994 when the next Session of Parliament would be. I have good news for the hon. Gentleman—join us in the Lobby tonight, because this is the legislation that he regarded as so critical just a few months ago.

Mr. Spearing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, he will not.

Mr. Caborn: On a very important point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the security of Government files. I have just been handed a file on the Second Reading of the Gas Bill—a file that obviously should be in the Minister's hands. All the points that he has mentioned are there—notes on intervention, regional pricing, winners and losers, small customers, cherry picking, direct debit, jobs, safety and the role of the regulator. They are all here in this file and as you will see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are marked, "Priority", "Immediate", and "Priority" again. I am sure—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The Chair is not responsible for any sources of reference that hon. Members may have. Clearly, the speech of the President of the Board of Trade has a little way to go yet.

Mr. Caborn: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is no good the hon. Gentleman standing there and waving papers at the Chair. With the greatest of respect, that was not a point of order for me.

Mr. Heseltine: It is a huge hoot that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) should be able to raise that matter today, but if he ever gets into government, he will discover that everything leaks. All that he has demonstrated is that that was a particularly proficient and professional example of the art. Had I organised it myself, I could not have done it faster, and I could not have chosen a nicer hon. Member to do it to.

Another reason why the Opposition will try to persuade the House to vote for their amendment is that the Bill

"omits any regulatory provision to enable price cuts to consumers where there are unjustified salary and share options awarded to senior employees."

Dr. John Cunningham: Read that again.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes, I will. If the right hon. Gentleman cannot understand that, I shall be happy to read it again. The words are in the Opposition amendment and I thought that Opposition Members could read their amendments. It is clear that the right hon. Gentleman wants an opportunity to discuss recent pay awards and option schemes in British Gas. That is a legitimate thing for him to do and I am not complaining. He did not hear a word of protest from me. I am merely putting that subject on the agenda, so that when he gets up and does so, it will come as no surprise. Indeed, it might even encourage some of my hon. Friends to hang about to hear what the right hon. Gentleman has to say—not that he will not have said it all before.

Nevertheless, I want to deal with that matter seriously. It is suggested that the regulator should be able to impose pressures on gas industry prices to deal with unjustified salary and share options awarded to senior employees. The House will want to know that the turnover for British Gas is £9.698 billion—nearly £10 billion. Total board pay and share options are under £10 million, which works out at 0.09695 per cent. of turnover—less than 1,000th of total turnover. Worked out in terms of the effect on the average domestic customer, it means that if there were no directors, stock options or bonuses, the price to that customer would be reduced by 50p a year. British Gas has succeeded in bringing down prices by 20 per cent., which is £77 for the average domestic customer. So, if one got rid of all the senior directors, bonuses and options and did not replace them, one would save 50p—for a board of directors who have saved customers £77 a year.

I have this question for the right hon. Member for Copeland. Will he not replace that remuneration? Will there be no directors? Where would he recruit them, what would he pay them and how much would that take back from the 50p that he implies would be saved? Does he really think that he could run British Gas and all those other companies with no directors and no cosy soft jobs for pensioned-off trade unionists? He had better not tell them that this side of a general election campaign.

The Opposition are trying desperately to confuse the public about the transformation that they are trying to bring about in Labour party policy on the issue. That policy lacks any credibility because they have had to abandon—or half of them have had to abandon—everything that they have ever believed in on the issue. That is a slight exaggeration, because some Labour Members have certainly not abandoned those beliefs.

I have before me a reference to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who is rather keen on advising people about remuneration. I understand that he is making a killing out of advising directors in the private sector about stock options and remunerative packages—*[Interruption.]* I am not complaining, but observing that a member of the Labour party is making a killing out of all that. Having done so, in another capacity he is teaching them to present themselves as well as possible, in a friendly and smiling fashion on television, to rationalise and justify to the British people the remuneration packages that he has told them how to get—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the Secretary of State warned the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) that he intended to refer to him. There is a code in the Chamber, which Madam

Speaker has re-emphasised, that if hon. Members are to be referred to, they should be done the courtesy of being forewarned.

Mr. Heseltine: I respect that judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall convey to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West the fact that I did not give him warning and that I have referred to that matter. As it has been in national newspapers and as he has set himself up as an authority on the matter, he might have come to the House today to participate in the debate. He is an endangered species—he is hunting with the hounds and with the hares. He jolly nearly got himself outlawed in the House a week ago.

The Opposition amendment reveals that the Labour party has been forced to abandon its opposition to privatisation. It has been forced to recognise that every Government of any significance in the world are moving in the direction that this Government pioneered. Labour Members know that that is in tune with the mood of the people and that is why they have abandoned their long-held views.

Conservative Members have long-held views on the strength of the private competitive world, which offers better services, and is the most effective on quality and prices. We stick to our views and we will stick to this legislation.

4.59 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give the Gas Bill a Second Reading because it believes that the Bill fails to provide effective safeguards for consumers against the deleterious consequences of deregulation of the domestic gas market; is damaging to the interests of many sections of the population, including elderly people, those with low incomes, and those living in South West England, Wales and other parts of the United Kingdom distant from beaching points; fails to provide adequate resources for health and safety monitoring of the implications of deregulation; does not require suppliers to provide the financial surety necessary to guarantee security of supply to consumers; does not address the question of regional electricity companies attempting to enter the gas market; fails effectively to emphasise the need for energy efficiency; and omits any regulatory provision to enable price cuts to consumers where there are unjustified salary and share options awarded to senior employees.

We have just listened to a predictable rant by the President of the Board of Trade, which is now his everyday performance when he comes to the Chamber. On this occasion, as on previous occasions, we give him two out of 10 for content but slightly higher marks for artistic impression, except when he resorted to a squalid attack on my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) without doing him the courtesy of notifying him in advance. It is indicative of the depths to which the right hon. Gentleman has descended that he should do that despite the recent admonishment of Madam Speaker about such personal attacks in the Chamber.

The President of the Board of Trade had a lot of say about many matters except the Bill. That is not surprising because, when he talked about the Bill, he demonstrated that he knows little about its implications. Even when the Minister for Energy and Industry whispered the answers in his ear, he confused some of his responses, as I shall demonstrate in a moment.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about 1985 and 1988. We could all remind him where he was in 1988. He was writing a book called "Where There's a Will", which was deeply critical of the Government's policies. It was all about intervention, doing more to support British industry and creating jobs. No one has done a bigger flip-flop than the right hon. Gentleman since coming back to office, except possibly his colleague who has just been appointed a Minister having travelled from the Labour party, through the SDP, to the Conservative Benches.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as the President of the Board of Trade had nothing to say about executive pay except to justify it, he seemed to be at odds with the Prime Minister?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is right. I do not know whether the President noticed, but, in the middle of his pathetic rant, even the chief executive of British Gas walked out. So I do not think that he has convinced many people in the Chamber or elsewhere by his performance today.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): They are all going now. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. For the record, no one who should be here has walked out.

Dr. Cunningham: It is a pity about the President's performance because this legislation is not only complex but important as it covers the safety and security of the supply of gas to many millions of people. The Bill comes at a time of huge public dissatisfaction with the Government's privatisation policies and the conduct of those in charge of privatised industries. It comes at a point when public and political mistrust of the powers, duties and performance of industry regulators is high and widespread.

That the Bill is before the House at all owes more to the humiliating failure of the President of the Board of Trade to convince even his colleagues that the Post Office should be privatised than to any other reason. His isolation on that issue was further confirmed by the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry last week.

The Bill's complexity, with 17 clauses, six schedules and some 68 pages of detailed proposals, is predictable enough, but much has been left out of the Bill and will be known and understood only when licences for gas suppliers are published. It is typical of this Government that they invite the House to accept the proposals in the absence of vital information in those licences. A second criticism is that the Bill leaves too much to the interpretation of the regulator. At a time when the regulatory regime has been found wanting, that is completely unacceptable to us.

Dr. Hampson: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Trade and Industry Select Committee, which has a Labour chairman and produced a unanimous report, said that British Gas should be deregulated as rapidly as possible for the sake of domestic customers, and that we were leading the world in terms of consumer choice at the meter? Does he also accept that the Committee agreed unanimously that there would be lower prices for customers, wherever they were in the United Kingdom and, in particular, that private competitors to British Gas

[Dr. Hampson]

entering the market have even talked of abolishing standing charges? Does he, as Labour party spokesman, accept each of those points?

Dr. Cunningham: No, I do not, and I shall come to the Select Committee's recommendations a little later.

Mr. Spearing: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

It is well established that there has been widespread disagreement between British Gas, Ofgas and the Department of Trade and Industry about the Bill. That no doubt accounts for the absence of information on the suppliers' licences today. In many respects, the proposals are simply a leap in the dark. Last December, the Trade and Industry Select Committee concluded—I shall quote rather than paraphrase, as the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) did, from the report:

"We found no correlation between competition in the industrial market and what is envisaged for domestic supply, and could find no parallel examples abroad".

The Committee went on to say:

"We could find no hard evidence to suggest that competition as currently conceived would deliver substantial reductions in gas purchase prices".

Those are two conclusions of the Trade and Industry Select Committee.

Important questions have been raised about fundamental aspects of the Bill by all the leading consumer bodies, the Gas Consumers Council, the National Consumer Council—

Dr. Hampson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I register the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has misinterpreted a Select Committee of the House by quoting passages entirely out of context—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with the Chair. Hon. Members' interpretation of other hon. Members' speeches is entirely up to them. There are plenty of opportunities in the House for hon. Members to make corrections.

Dr. Hampson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have ruled on that matter.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman seems to be about to take leave of whatever senses he has left.

Mr. Spearing: A few moments ago, my right hon. Friend mentioned the Bill's unexpected consequences. Is he aware that, in Bromley by Bow in my constituency, we have a depot containing 20,000 spare units in multiple for gas consumers throughout south-east England? A year ago, the depot was to be expanded under an efficient British Gas; it is now to be closed consequent on the requirement of competition. Does not that show that safety and consumer satisfaction will be reduced in south-east England, with redundancies and the closure of that depot?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. That closure was announced on 1 January this year.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The right hon. Gentleman has misled the House. May I quote from the conclusions of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, which clearly say:

"There will be benefits to consumers from the increased choice and lower costs flowing from the liberalisation"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If I heard the hon. Gentleman correctly, he said that the Opposition spokesman had misled the House. I must therefore ask him to withdraw that phrase.

Mr. Banks: Perhaps I should have said "misquoted" the Select Committee report. May I point out that the conclusions clearly show that the Trade and Industry Select Committee recognises that there will be advantages to consumers from competition, and lower prices for consumers. It is as clear as a bell.

Dr. Cunningham: I quoted the report of the Select Committee and I stand by that.

Dr. Hampson: Misquoted. It was out of context.

Dr. Cunningham: The retention of the Gas Consumers Council is to be welcomed. It is important that such a body, independent of the regulator, the industry and the Government, should speak out for gas consumers. The council will need to be especially vigilant in the proposed new competitive domestic market. It must be adequately funded.

The Select Committee and unions working in the gas industry, including the GMB, which sponsors me, have raised important questions. These concerns are reflected in the amendment. Briefly, they are matters of consumer protection, consumer safety, energy efficiency, standards in the industry, regulatory weakness, openness and transparency of government and regulator alike.

It is interesting to reflect on what British Gas thinks about these matters. I have a minute of a meeting called by Mr. Peter Sanguinetti—it is an internal memorandum—during December 1994. The minute reads:

"There were many comments about the problems caused by the executive and the board making decisions without considering the impact of their actions internally as well as externally. The inevitable conclusion is that we have the potential for a crisis just about every week for the next two months at least."

The memo with the minute refers to the withdrawal of services and shops, TransCo having problems with United, which is not paying its bills, the fact that almost 200 members of staff who now have no jobs will be encouraged to leave and TransCo no longer operating leakage survey teams. It appears that TransCo's staff will only go into homes and make the gas supply safe. They will not repair appliances. New debt and disconnection policies are foreshadowed for April. It is possible that disconnections will increase. Meter reading is to be contracted out. That is quite a contrast with what the President of the Board of Trade was saying about the

maintenance of current levels of service by British Gas. He is completely wrong about that, as he was about many other things.

Mr. Heseltine: It seemed that the right hon. Gentleman was not happy about the contrast between what he said and what the Select Committee reported. Is he aware that the conclusion reads:

"We believe that some further safeguards are required, but most of the fears now appear to have been unfounded or exaggerated, especially as regards the transitional period."

Why does the right hon. Gentleman—

Dr. Cunningham: Read on.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes, I shall do so. The conclusion continues:

"There will be benefits to consumers from the increased choice and lower costs flowing from the liberalisation of the domestic gas market, but the scale of the benefits and who would benefit is uncertain."

The whole—

Dr. Cunningham: Read on.

Mr. Heseltine: Of course. The paragraph continues:

"Since the Government had already encouraged new suppliers to prepare for entry to the market, we welcome the fact that legislation is to be introduced to comply with the intended timetable, and we emphasise the importance of proceeding in accordance with that timetable".

How can the right hon. Gentleman continue producing canards when the Select Committee, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), has patently stated that he is peddling "unfounded or exaggerated" half truths?

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman had better say that to the National Consumer Council, the Gas Consumers Council and the Consumers Association, all of which have raised the same questions in their briefings, which I assume have been sent to every Member of this place. I am not inventing threats or fears. I am merely expressing the views that are held by all the principal consumer associations—

Mr. Heseltine: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall give way in a moment when I have finished my sentence, if the right hon. Gentleman does not mind.

Of course, there is a welcome for the proposals in principle, but questions have been raised about benefits to consumers and services to consumers, as I have been outlining.

Mr. Heseltine: The Second Reading of a Bill is about the principles that lie behind the Bill. As the right hon. Gentleman has now conceded that the Select Committee wants us to go on, as do all the consumer bodies, will he join my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government Lobby tonight?

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman is strangely mistaken if he does not realise, after all his experience in the House, that we have tabled a reasoned amendment. He had a great deal to say about it but apparently he has not taken on board its implications. The jobs of thousands of workers are in question. Many of these people are highly skilled and experienced in safety and maintenance work on behalf of consumers.

Section 10 of the Gas Act 1986 contains an obligation to provide a gas supply. That obligation has been replaced in the Bill by a requirement merely to connect premises to the network. The omission of a statutory obligation to supply any consumer who requests that that be done seriously diminishes consumer protection. That, too, is the view of consumer organisations. People should have the right of supply regardless of who they are, what their income is, where they live or how they pay. The Bill gives no such guarantee. It is said that the obligation to supply will be included in licences, but they will be subject to change without the consent of Parliament. That is unacceptable to my right hon. and hon. Friends because we believe that consumers' interests and protection should be at the heart of the Bill. We know from recent events in the electricity industry that shareholders' interests have been paramount in the view of industry chiefs and of Ministers. That attitude should not be replicated in the gas industry.

Consumers and regions throughout the country must be fully protected from discrimination by suppliers. There is the so-called cherry-picking threat. The problem is not comprehensively eliminated by the proposals that are set out in the Bill. Why is a legislative obligation not placed on suppliers completely to prevent discrimination against elderly people, people with low incomes and areas of the country that are deprived and contain many unemployed people?

Consumer protection should be a primary duty of the Secretary of State and the director general, but as the Bill stands that is not so. It is vital that everyone has access to clear and concise comparable information on tariffs. Prices in terms of supply should be presented in a standard form by all companies so that consumers can make an informed decision, or they may well make the wrong decision. The dangers of misleading information and unfair terms are well documented in consumer affairs.

Clause 2 appears to make public safety subject to section 4(1) of the 1986 Act. That should not be so. The duty to secure effective competition should not override safety for the public. There is worrying evidence about the rising number of accidents involving gas poisoning, which reached record levels in 1994, according to the Health and Safety Executive.

British Gas apparently intends to withdraw from the installation and service market for all domestic appliances other than space and water heating. That contradicts what the President of the Board of Trade said. It intends to cease stocking parts for cookers, fires and other appliances, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said in his intervention. These are matters that cause us considerable concern, especially when the Gas Consumers Council, in its 1993 annual report, stated:

"Proven incompetence does not yet appear to result in automatic removal of an installer from the Corgi register."

Even when companies are shown to be incompetent in matters of maintenance and safety they are allowed to continue providing a service to consumers.

Nor is there any statutory requirement for individual gas operatives to hold a certificate of competence. Of course, that would never be the case at British Gas with its service and maintenance arrangements. The reality, in

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contradistinction to what the President of the Board of Trade argued, is that the whole culture of gas safety is being revised by the proposed legislation. In future, TransCo will simply make safe or turn off the supply rather than effect comprehensive repairs or replacement. Hitherto, British Gas set and policed the safety standards. That will end with the proposed legislation, if enacted.

The social care obligation is also changed by the proposals. We discussed and exchanged views, during the President's speech, about free safety checks being retained. We shall certainly pursue that matter again in Committee. Labour Members were not convinced by what he said about free safety checks being retained and that an automatic three-year safety check would be retained for elderly and disabled people. Will home service advisers continue to give special help to consumers who are blind, elderly, frail or disabled? The right hon. Gentleman said that no change was envisaged. He seems blithely unaware that the number of home service advisers has already been cut by 60 in advance of the legislation. How can he tell the House that those services will be maintained when the number of home service advisers is being so dramatically reduced? He clearly does not know what he is talking about. Those are vital questions and we have just demonstrated that the right hon. Gentleman does not know the answer to them.

I can go on. British Gas made clear, in a memorandum in December last year, its decision to review the current provision of adaptors for gas appliances and its intention to review the provision of Brailled controls for gas appliances and to withdraw its literature that is currently available in Braille. So much for the right hon. Gentleman's assurances to the House that no detrimental changes were envisaged.

We have seen the problems that the President of the Board of Trade got himself into over the electricity industry, and the hostile bid for Northern Electric. On Monday 20 February, in this Chamber, he misled me and the House over his power to veto in relation to the actions of Office of Electricity Regulation. The right hon. Gentleman was good enough to write to me on 24 February to confirm that he had misled me in the House on that occasion. Since this is a complex matter, I was quite prepared to accept the apology that he gave in his letter. He placed on record in that letter what he should have told me about his duties and responsibilities in that letter. I have it here, but will not detain the House by reading it out.

The right hon. Gentleman appears in the proposed legislation to be giving himself the same powers as the Director General of Gas Supply, who has the power to refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, as he has already done with the Director General of Electricity Supply. Why does he want the power? Why does he believe it necessary? If he envisages using the power, will he announce to the House his reasons for it? We are entitled to some explanation on that issue, too.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The right hon. Member for Copeland is correct. These are vital matters of principle. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has tabled a reasoned amendment, which I shall be happy to support, but given the importance of these matters, will he be voting against the Bill itself?

Dr. John Cunningham: No. We shall be voting on our reasoned amendment, for the reasons set out in it and in the context of reservations about the proposed legislation. That is our position.

The Government are apparently so uncertain of the consequences of the proposals on consumer prices, safety and the industry that they have agreed to a trial. That decision is welcome, especially as so many organisations share our concerns about the Bill. It is clear that the Government dare not proceed with their original grandiose plans to introduce the proposals nationwide all in one go. But apparently, according to the proposed legislation and the associated literature, the trials are to be confined to operational efficiency. As the all-party Trade and Industry Select Committee said, in paragraph 60 of its first report:

> "It would be pointless to have a transitional period unless there is full assessment of its consequences and wide consultation, including parliamentary scrutiny, before further steps are taken."

The Labour party strongly shares that view.

Recent experiences of privatisation, competition and regulation have shown that regulation is weak and has been ineffective in protecting consumers. Privatised companies put shareholders first. They do not fully disclose all the details of their financial circumstances to regulators and, as we have seen in electricity supply, consumers have been overcharged for years.

The Director General of Gas Supply will have many gas companies to regulate. We cannot be confident of success, especially as recent experience in the gas industry shows that, from December 1986—since privatisation—to January 1995, the price of gas, as measured by the retail prices index, has fallen by 16 per cent. But the price of gas, based on the producer price index, has fallen by 40 per cent.—more than twice as much. The consumer has not received commensurate benefits from that reduction. The consumer has not had the good deal that the right hon. Gentleman was trying to claim that he has had.

These proposals come at a time when, in Britain, inequality is worse than at any time in the past 50 years. As the Rowntree report showed, in the past 15 years, inequality in the United Kingdom has grown faster than in any other industrialised country, with the exception of New Zealand. One in four people now lives in a household with an income below half the national average. The bottom tenth of the population is 17 per cent. worse off after housing costs than in 1979. The distribution of income is more unequal today than at any time since the war. In addition, as the British Medical Association reported last week, the widening health gap between rich and poor is a direct result of the Government's wrong priorities and unfair policies.

In the monopoly market, the additional costs to British Gas of quasi-social obligations for all those on low incomes, elderly and disabled people, have been spread across the whole consumer base. Will those costs now be recovered from vulnerable consumers or will they continue effectively to be shared? I raised that issue when I intervened during the speech of the President of the Board of Trade. I was not convinced by his answers.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, the Bill does nothing to end excessive salary and share option abuses. I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman agrees with the Prime Minister, who, in answer to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, said:

"Yes, I do find these payments as distasteful as the right hon. Gentleman—as do, I dare say, many other people as well . . . I believe that they bring the system into disrepute."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. 837.]

Today the President seemed to be sweeping all that aside in his apparent acceptance of this. Here is the first opportunity for the right hon. Gentleman to act to end those abuses that the Prime Minister finds so distasteful, and he does nothing. There are no such proposals in the Bill. There are no powers for the regulator to cut prices where abuse occurs, to call directors and executives to account. Does the Prime Minister, sorry, the President—I beg his pardon, but we know that he would like to be Prime Minister—approve of Mr. Giordano receiving £450,000 for a two-day week as part-time chairman of British Gas? Does he approve of Mr. Cedric Brown's share options? Does the President realise that, if the recently announced British Gas incentive scheme had been in operation, Mr. Brown would not have qualified for a single share on his or his company's performance over the past three years?

The total productivity of British Gas showed almost no improvement between 1989 and 1994; yet Mr. Brown, Mr. Giordano and their colleagues awarded themselves more than 1 million share options over that period. That was based neither on the company's performance nor on their own performance, and under the new incentive scheme that they have introduced not one of those shares would be available to them on merit. When the share options are set beside the company's performance, they are shown to be completely undeserved; yet the President of the Board of Trade remains silent.

The right hon. Gentleman supported Mr. Brown when the news first broke a few weeks ago. Is that still his position? Would he like to tell us? Is this not all too typical of the present Government?

Mr. Heseltine: What I supported—on a Monday morning edition of the "Today" programme, if I remember rightly—was the announcement by the new chairman of British Gas, Dick Giordano, that he did not want a hidden regime in British Gas. He did not want executives to receive bonuses and share options that added up, in large measure, to what looked like a salary. He therefore put together a remuneration package for Cedric Brown that enabled him, instead of receiving bonuses on top of his salary, to receive a salary that included those bonuses.

That led to a second stage—the increase in salary, which I believe was £75,000. I am the first to recognise that that is a large sum, but the increase was portrayed as an increase in the basic salary to which the bonuses had been added—an increase of many hundred per cent. I said on "Today" that I thought that the chairman was right to create an open regime, enabling everyone to see what was happening; but I have also said many times, in the House and in public, that the Prime Minister is right to be concerned about such matters. I still believe that, which is why I welcome the establishment of a committee under Sir Richard Greenbury to examine the position.

I leave the right hon. Gentleman with a question that he will not want to answer. If he could fix the salaries of all directors of utilities, including British Gas—which he implies that he would like to do—how much difference does he think that that would make to the cost of gas to the customer? I calculate that, if no directors were paid, 50p a year would be saved. How much does the right hon. Gentleman think that he would save?

Dr. Cunningham: The public want action, regardless of whether it makes any difference to their gas bills. The right hon. Gentleman does not seem to recognise that the public are fed up with seeing these people—I shall deal with the others for whom he is responsible in a moment—rip them off and make themselves rich in ways that are unconnected with their performance.

The right hon. Gentleman seems not to have heard what I said. British Gas's total productivity showed almost no improvement; how could anyone qualify for a bonus when it had not been earned? How could those people justify giving themselves more than 1 million share options for which they would not qualify under the new regime that they themselves have introduced? How does the right hon. Gentleman defend that?

Mr. Heseltine: I shall try to explain to the right hon. Gentleman. A few years ago, British Gas was a cosy monopoly, protected from any competition and with virtually no international ramifications. Today, it faces intense competition in the industrial and commercial markets. It has lost a significant part of its market, because the private sector has come in with lower prices. It has turned itself into a major investor in North sea oil and gas, and has become a world-class company trading in 45 countries. That represents a transformation in Britain's ability to fight in the international market place.

The endless endeavours of the right hon. Gentleman and his party to pretend that British Gas today is what it was five years ago are a manipulation of the reality. British Gas is now a major British international company.

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that pay and share options can be taken regardless of company performance. Incidentally, he is wrong about something else as well: in no circumstances do my right hon. Friends and I want to make such decisions, but we want proper systems. We want remuneration committees that are not stuffed with the cronies of those whose salaries they are raising; and we want duties and obligations to be laid on people to behave with some decency when the stewardship is theirs.

Mr. Heseltine: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman gave notice to his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West of that personal attack on him.

Dr. Cunningham: It is all too typical of the Government to refuse—as the President of the Board of Trade has done again today—to deal with abuses perpetrated by those on large incomes, while at the same time introducing legislation to weaken consumer protection and, perhaps, increase charges for pensioners, disabled people and families on low incomes. True to type, the right hon. Gentleman proposes again to risk the widening of inequalities in his legislation.

We know that the Prime Minister is pressing the right hon. Gentleman on these matters, and that the public want action; we also know that the President of the Board of

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Trade is loth to take such action. We know that because someone sent me a copy of a letter from the right hon. Gentleman's office to the Prime Minister's office—a letter from the right hon. Gentleman's private secretary, Ms Rachel Jenkinson, to Mrs. Mary Francis, the Prime Minister's private secretary at No. 10 Downing street.

The letter says:

"On this issue, obtaining information from Stock Exchange sources and direct approaches to the companies would run the risk of becoming a rather public exercise which the President is loth to undertake."

I am not surprised that he is loth to undertake it. With the letter is a 20-page memorandum listing the bodies—British Gas, London Electricity, Eastern Electricity, Manweb, Northern Electric, Anglian Water, North West Water and so on—and the millions of share options that have been awarded regardless of performance. The right hon. Gentleman apparently intends to do nothing about that.

The letter says:

"The results suggest that there are potentially more causes célèbres to be found. In view of the figures shown in table 2 against the RECs in particular, this suggests that we should expect a good deal of publicity in June and July this year."

That shows that self-awarded bonuses and share options, unattached to any performance criteria, are a matter of fact under the present Government. They are part of the system that the President of the Board of Trade and his right hon. and hon. Friends have established, and he intends to do nothing about it. So be it; the public will make their own judgment. The Bill raises that and many other issues of public concern. On this issue the President appears to be paralysed. He is more like Ulysses than Tarzan, sulking in his tent.

The Bill raises a wide range of enormously important issues such as the right to supply, safety, pricing policy and consumer protection. It threatens the employment of thousands of people. The President and the Government have been widely condemned for issuing a false prospectus just a few days ago for the share sale in National Power and PowerGen. By pursuing these issues in Committee we intend to try to prevent them from doing that again. That is why I ask the House to vote for our amendment.

5.40 pm

Sir Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has given the Labour party's response to the Bill. As his speech rolled on, I felt a bit sorry for him because, apart from picking out one or two important points which I agree should be considered in Committee, he could find nothing to say against the Bill's general principle. Therefore, he spent the greater part of his speech digging around in the same rather unpleasant way as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and trying to mislead the public even further about the facts of some of the remuneration for people in the recently privatised industries. For example, he suggested that the share options and other packages are offered to a small number of people. I think that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East spoke about a handful of directors, but, as is well established throughout British industry, share options are generally given to many people in a business to motivate them.

The right hon. Gentleman is the shadow President of the Board of Trade and, if there were an accident, he could be in office. I do not think that there will be an accident but there could be, and the right hon. Gentleman needs to understand these matters. I hope that I can take him with me on this issue. Does he agree that motivation for people doing any work in industry is important? The right hon. Gentleman nods assent. He and I, like most people, would agree that finding proper ways to motivate people to be successful is important. Therefore, we cannot begrudge the result of that motivation when people are successful. In a sense, that is what the share option argument is about.

Share options are of no value whatever unless the recipients have performed so well that the shares have gone up in price. The right hon. Gentleman and I debated this a few days ago in the House. I hope he realises that profits from share options do not come from the company. They are an economical way to reward people or to motivate them towards success. The profit comes from the remaining shareholders and not from a company's coffers.

Dr. John Cunningham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene because I spoke for longer than I had intended. Let me be quite clear. I believe in high rewards for high performance. It is right for people to be highly rewarded for outstanding performance. If people create wealth and employment in the British economy and for their organisations they deserve high rewards, but such rewards must be merited and in the cases that I mentioned they cannot be justified. They were not merited by the performance of the individuals or the organisations, and that is especially true of British Gas. Shares were overvalued in the electricity supply industry, not on the basis of performance, but because consumers were being overcharged.

Sir Michael Grylls: I note what the right hon. Gentleman says.

Dr. Hampson: My hon. Friend will recall that Mr. Cedric Brown had his salary package changed because, as many of us agree, the existing share option was unsatisfactory. The new share option is performance related, which is what the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was calling for. Ironically, in his speech he somehow condemned that because he said that if it had been in place, Mr. Cedric Brown would not have got his bonus increases. The scheme was changed to a performance-related system and the length of time that his contract had to run was reduced.

Sir Michael Grylls: My hon. Friend is right, and he reinforces the remarks of my right hon. Friend the President, who dealt effectively with that matter.

It is rather strange to hear the shadow President of the Board of Trade, in what we are led to believe is the new model Labour party, saying—I carefully wrote it down—that it is wrong for people "to make themselves rich". I thought that the Labour party had changed and wanted to see an improvement in the living standards of our people and to see people in industry doing well, being motivated and getting the rewards of that motivation.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The hon. Gentleman spoke about share options being well spread and giving

encouragement to people. How many share options did the manageress of the British Gas shop in Hemsworth receive to encourage her?

Sir Michael Grylls: I cannot answer that precisely, but I can respond to the hon. Gentleman as I am about to move to that matter. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me. I shall correct some of the deliberately misleading statements by Labour in recent weeks about some of the share options. For example, some 200 staff and managers have share options in Seeboard, which is one of the smallest regional electricity companies. However, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East spoke about only six of its directors. He has misled people over that. In Yorkshire Electricity, there were 54 such people, but the hon. Gentleman referred to only five and divided the sum of money between them. That is the sort of sleight of hand that would get an accountant behind bars very quickly. It is extraordinary how a Member of Parliament can get away with that.

Dr. John Cunningham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Michael Grylls: I shall give way in a moment.

In East Midlands Electricity, 37 employees received the benefit of share options rather than the four directors mentioned by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East in his news release. I could give further examples, but I suspect that I might be told that we are debating British Gas and not other companies.

It is important to have truth and accuracy, and it is certainly important that, where possible, there should be agreement between the two sides. If we agree that people need to be motivated it is quite wrong and intellectually dishonest to attack those who are so motivated. That is my principal point on that issue.

I warmly welcome the Bill. It could have been improved by being called the gas competition Bill, because that is what it is all about. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade rightly sketched the early history of gas supply. At one time it was generally accepted that it had to be a monopoly, but while Conservative Members realise that we have moved on from those days, apparently Labour Members do not. Nowadays, there can be safe and effective competition and it can operate in the interests of the consumer. That is what the Bill is about: it is not just about price.

Price, of course, is affected by competition. All our experience of shopping in the high street leads us to believe that competition encourages prices to be kept down and, if possible, reduced, but competition also leads to improved service. This is what I find strange about the Opposition. They talk as if the introduction of competition will lead to the disappearance of services for the disabled, the blind and others who particularly need looking after. Experience shows the opposite.

Most hon. Members will remember that, some years ago, when British Gas was a sleepy old state-owned company, a great deal of our constituency mail consisted of letters from desperate people who could not get the gas board to come round and put their appliances right, and so on. I can only speak for myself, although I suspect that most hon. Members share my experience: since privatisation, the complaints have all but disappeared. To be sure, mistakes still happen in any industry, but they have been greatly reduced in this one. I cannot remember when I last had a letter from a constituent complaining about the service that he had received from a gas supplier. I accept, however, that the service can be improved—hence the argument behind this extension of competition, which is about improving the standard of service.

In conversations with some of the gas suppliers, I have been told that they see improved standards as part of their role. I have, for instance, a circular from United Gas, one of the new private companies. The company says on the first page:

> "Gas is fundamental to quality of life and is not merely a commodity. Service to the customer is not only essential but is also one of the principal ways, along with price, that companies will gain market share."

In other words, the company views it as important to its business to be able to say to the consumer, "Come to us for your supply, because we will offer you a better service than will any other supplier." That is competition, and it is just the same as a high street shop offering people a better service than the shop next door. Gas is no different.

United Gas goes on to say:

> "We see opportunities to improve standards in areas such as (1) no disconnection in winter months for elderly customers with debt problems, (2) more frequent meter reading to avoid debt and disconnection problems, and (3) maintenance of an industry-wide Gas Care Register".

Those ideas have been advanced by one of the new competing gas companies. They show that such companies want to enter the marketplace. Thanks to the Bill, they will be allowed to do so, so as to offer better services and, one hopes, lower prices.

We saw the same thing when British Telecom was privatised. Waiting lists for telephones have evaporated. There used to be 250,000 people waiting for telephones, but there are no waiting lists now and people can get telephones installed quickly.

When British Airways was the sole airline flying the London-Glasgow route—I remember this well, as I used to go to Glasgow quite often—the company used to tell passengers that the flight was so short that it did not have time to serve them breakfast. That was unfortunate, since I rather like breakfast early in the morning—as, I suspect, do many other people. Wonder of wonders: once British Midland was allowed on the route, it said, "Of course we can supply breakfast while flying between London and Glasgow", and it did. Business men benefited, and—lo and behold—British Airways found a way of supplying breakfast, too. That is what competition does. Strangely, the new model Labour party seems to have forgotten what competition is all about.

Monopoly can do a great deal of damage to the public. It may be the dream of many business men; most business men would love to misbehave by rigging the market to create a monopoly. That is why we need competition authorities—to ensure that it does not happen and to protect the consumer. I believe that it is the duty of every Government to end monopolies wherever they find them—in the utilities or in the ordinary marketplace that we encounter every day.

As for the opportunities offered by competition, there is always—understandably—a great deal of emphasis on the reduction in unemployment that follows the modernisation and privatisation of those industries, because they have to be run efficiently. British Gas had about three people for every two jobs. Clearly, that could not go on in a competitive marketplace. Quite reasonably,

[Sir Michael Grylls]

the Opposition called the loss of jobs a bad thing. So it is when people lose their jobs in the first instance, but let us look at the positive side. New jobs are created in other companies entering the marketplace. That is exactly what happened in the telecommunications industry, and I believe that it will happen in the gas industry, too.

For the employee, competition can also be beneficial. As long as there is only a monopoly, the employee is in a dicey position. If he falls out with his manager or director, he has nowhere else to go. There is only one gas company and if he leaves it, he has nowhere to work. If, however, there are a dozen competing companies and the employee does not like one of them, he goes to another. That is what happened with BT; there are now about 120 competing firms in the telecommunications market, where there used to be only one, and we know what good results that has had for the public.

When the election comes, the electors will have an interesting choice. They can choose the new model Labour party which is apparently going to renationalise some of the utilities. We do not yet know which ones, but no doubt Labour will tell the country. It will make them into monopolies again and close independent gas companies, for instance. The outcome will be lower services at higher prices. Alternatively, the electors can chose to stick with the Conservative party which has brought about competition, with lower utilities prices, to the benefit of the consumer.

That is a clear choice. I believe that people will chose the Government and the party who really believe in competition and in the free market; and in giving other companies a chance of coming into the market. What is proposed here for the gas industry is a massive step forward, for which the Government should be warmly applauded.

5.57 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): I begin by declaring the fact that I am sponsored as a Member of Parliament by Unison, the trade union which represents many of the workers in the gas industry. I might explain for the record that that means that I receive no money personally, but my constituency party receives about £600 a year towards its running costs and, at the last election, received £2,200 towards election expenses.

Reference was made earlier to a bundle of documents that had been mislaid. I have now had the benefit of reading the Minister of State's wind-up speech, which we shall not hear officially until later this evening. As usual, it is an excellent speech—written, I believe, on 8 March, when the Minister predicted the nature of the contributions that would be heard from Opposition Members:

> "What I have found particularly fascinating is the muddle, contradiction and hypocrisy emanating from the Benches opposite."

What marvellous foresight that shows on the part of the Minister of State. Perhaps he could also predict the winner of the gold cup at Cheltenham on Thursday—that would be of real benefit to hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber.

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): The hon. Gentleman obviously did not get to the fourth paragraph of my speech.

Mr. Byers: The second paragraph was more than enough.

In his Second Reading speech, the President of the Board of Trade referred at some length to the licensing regime and rightly stressed the importance of the licensing procedures. It was interesting and a matter of some concern that the documents contained a briefing note to the Minister stating clearly that the Minister should not

> "refer to licences being available at the beginning of the committee stage",

which his civil servants say is unlikely. The note goes on to say that the Minister should always refer to licences being available in Committee but without specifying exactly when that important information will be made available. I urge the Minister to ensure that the licences are available at the beginning of the Committee stage.

Mr. Eggar: As the old adage states, civil servants are there to advise, and Ministers are there to decide. Having received the advice that the hon. Gentleman has clearly read, I have given an undertaking to Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen that I shall do my utmost to make the suppliers licence available on the first morning of the Committee. I cannot give the assurance that I had hoped to give that the transportation and shippers licences will be available on the first morning of the Committee, but I am extremely hopeful that, if they are not available on that morning, they will be available later. I have always said that I will make the suppliers licence available as early as possible, and that it would available on the first day of the Committee.

It is right that licences should be available to the House and to the Committee as early as possible. I have always been critical of situations in which hon. Members have been deprived of information that is essential if a Committee is properly to consider a proposal.

Mr. Byers: I welcome the Minister's comments. Clearly, the licensing regime and the details contained in the licences will be of crucial importance for a proper consideration of the Bill. I welcome the assurance that he has given.

Superficially, it is attractive to open up the domestic gas market for competition. I have always taken the view that competition is necessary if we are to have a strong, dynamic and vibrant private sector. That is good for the economy as a whole, with our industries competing, as they must, in the world market. Competition will often bring real benefits to the consumer in terms of wider choice, better quality and lower costs. It is important that Labour Members recognise the important role that competition can play in the private sector.

I therefore start from a presumption in favour of competition in industry. Overriding reasons must exist as to why, in the public interest and for the common good, competition should not be imposed on the domestic gas market. On balance, I take the view that, for practical

reasons, the Bill's provisions do not benefit all our people. Therefore, the Bill is not in the public interest. Nevertheless, my party's Front-Bench team and I recognise the importance of competition. We have therefore tabled a reasoned amendment which seeks to deal with some of the genuine concerns of many hon. Members and of the public about the provisions of the Bill.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission recommended that British Gas's domestic monopoly should not be removed until some three to five years after the company had divested itself of its trading arms, but that recommendation has in effect been ignored by the Government. Unfortunately, they have allowed political dogma to triumph over reason in imposing competition on the domestic market at a rapid rate.

In the relatively brief time available, I wish to deal with two issues to which the reasoned amendment refers: the pricing that is to be put into place, and hon. Members' real concerns about the Bill's safety provisions. Some 18 million domestic gas consumers use less than 2,500 therms per year. The President of the Board of Trade and my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) dealt earlier with cross-subsidy. Such a subsidy in the domestic gas market is highly significant. I think that all hon. Members recognise that the cross-subsidy is considerable and that domestic consumers who use a relatively high volume of gas—I think that the figure is more than 635 therms a year—are in effect subsidising the costs of consumers who use smaller amounts of gas.

The effect of that is that people in larger properties, who will be consuming greater amounts of gas and who will often be among the wealthier members of the community, are subsidising pensioners, people on low incomes, and people with a disability, who will often be living in accommodation where a relatively low amount of gas is used each year. The bills of the low-volume users are being subsidised by the wealthy high-volume users. That has been described to me as socialism in action.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten the House as to why the industrial user should be obliged to continue to subsidise the household user?

Mr. Byers: The Bill deals specifically with the domestic gas consumer. The point that I am trying to make is that the high-volume domestic consumer is subsidising the low-volume domestic consumer through the cross-subsidy. Conservative Members have advanced the argument to me that competition will drive down costs for everyone. That is an important point that I feel obliged to deal with later.

I was surprised at the extent of cross-subsidy. The House of Commons Library considered the effect of the subsidy in a purely statistical way. It showed that some 5 million gas domestic consumers who use 350 therms a year or less will pay 12.5 per cent. more for their gas if the cross-subsidy is removed while the cost for consumers using more than 2,000 therms will be cut by 10 per cent. if the subsidy is removed. An argument could be made that competition even protects people using low amounts of gas.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not get to the part of my briefing which referred to that calculation. Had he read that far, he would have realised that the whole basis of that calculation—assuming the accuracy of the leak of his speech that I read in *The Guardian* this morning—is false. That calculation appears to be based on a British Gas figure given in August 1992 which was subsequently withdrawn in the evidence given by British Gas to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry in 1994. There is the old adage, "Garbage in, garbage out." The hon. Gentleman should not try to make that kind of capital.

Mr. Byers: The Minister is probably more of an expert in garbage than I am. He will be aware that he cannot guarantee the level of charges or that there will be no losers under the Bill. If the Minister can give a guarantee, I will allow him to intervene again.

Mr. Eggar: It is the view of independent competitors of British Gas that there should be no losers. In a free market, it is impossible to predict with certainty the effect on the individual consumer. As I am not sure that this assumption was in the hon. Gentleman's calculation either, I remind him that the regulator's decision to fix the transportation standing charge at £15 per individual consumer means that the interests of low-volume consumers will be more than protected.

Mr. Byers: If the Minister could guarantee that the charge will remain at £15, I would welcome that enormously—as would low-volume users—but he knows that he will not take responsibility for maintaining the charge at £15. If he would, we should all breathe a sigh of relief. The Government have washed their hands of that responsibility and are prepared to leave the matter to the regulator. The Minister cannot guarantee that the £15 standing charge will remain.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): It is difficult for Opposition Members to accept that figures are independent. Giving evidence to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on one occasion, British Gas implied that the majority of its domestic consumers were contributing not profits but losses, but when giving evidence to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry British Gas changed its position. It has the facts at its fingertips, but if it cannot interpret its own facts, it is difficult for the public and the House to do so. I commend my hon. Friend for endeavouring to enlighten the public and to express our fears—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. That sounds remarkably like a speech, rather than an intervention.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend made the point that there is clear evidence of the political view currently held within the Department of Trade and Industry. The DTI paper "The Prospects for Coal", published in 1993, is a clear example of Government thinking on energy:

> "The aim of Government policy is to ensure that service is provided to customers in a commercial environment in which customers pay the full cost of the energy resources they consume."

[Mr. Byers]

If that happens in the way that the Department proposed in 1993, the Minister must accept that a large number of consumers will be losers under the Bill.

The argument is made that competition will drive prices down for all consumers, but in practice that will not be the case because new independent suppliers will be looking for the most profitable consumers. The suppliers will cherry pick. When profit is the motive, one can expect nothing else.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The hon. Gentleman suggests that low-volume users will incur extra costs or higher prices as a consequence of the lack of cross-subsidisation. The same fears were expressed about British Telecom, but low users now enjoy a rebate rather than the opposite. How does the hon. Gentleman argue against that?

Mr. Byers: If the Bill required such a rebate, I would accept the hon. Gentleman's point. Government advisers have warned about the implications of the Bi". Mr. Dieter Helm of New college, Oxford is not just an academic—I would not rely on his words if he were—but a member of the Government's energy panel and an adviser to the Minister. He said:

"There are almost certainly going to be winners and losers. Some people are paying too much for their gas at the moment and some people are paying too little. The new competitors coming into the market will want to pick the cherries . . . The losers are going to be those people who haven't really been paying the true cost of their gas supply in the past. Those are people who take relatively low amounts of gas, they're people who are, to put it bluntly, very difficult customers for British Gas or anyone else to service."

That Government adviser was telling the public what can be expected from the Bill. Even more significant is the view of the independent suppliers who will move into the market. The managing director of Alliance Gas, Mr. Kristoffer Maroe, said one month ago that

"it's impossible to stop cherry picking: that's what competition is all about."

The Government's own energy advisers make the point that there will be losers under the Bill.

Only clause 6(6) makes an effort to protect vulnerable groups in our communities. It states that the director shall not licence where it is proposed artificially to exclude

"an undue proportion of premises likely to be owned or occupied by persons who are disabled or of pensionable age, or who are likely to default in the payment of charges."

Such wording will bring a smile to the lips of every lawyer in the country, because it will be a nightmare to define. Cash registers will be ringing in courts throughout the land. That matter should not be left to the judicial process. In the supply of an essential commodity such as gas, the Government have a responsibility to provide a safety net to ensure that there will be no losers.

The public generally would consider it wrong to exclude a poor area of a city such as Newcastle, but clause 6(6) would not stop an independent supplier applying for a licence to supply the whole of a desirable area such as East Anglia—as opposed to north-east England, where a larger proportion of the population will be of pensionable age, on low incomes or unemployed.Writing in *The Times* recently, Melvyn Marckus commented:

"Eventually the penny will drop. Competition will herald cost-reflective prices, which in turn will mean winners and losers."

The other element in the reasoned amendment on which I wish to speak is safety, which must be paramount. The Minister has said that increased competition will not compromise safety, but I have bad news for him: it already has. He need only look at the way in which research and technology budgets, which are often devoted to improving safety, have been cut over the past few months because British Gas is cutting corners to prepare for competition.

I have a real constituency interest in this as the energy research station at Killingworth in my constituency is threatened with closure and the loss of almost 500 jobs. It would be inappropriate in this narrow debate to talk about the devastating impact on the north-east of England of the loss of highly skilled and well-paid jobs, but there will certainly be an impact on the ability of the gas industry to meet safety needs.

The gas business has been divided into five trading arms which last year spent £31.4 million on research and technology. This year the figure is down to £19.9 million and by 1999 it will be down to £14.2 million. Those budget reductions will have serious repercussions for the safety of the system. I am not talking about esoteric or academic research but about practical research which has real safety implications.

To be more competitive, British Gas is not just cutting the amount it spends on research and technology; even more dangerously, there are reductions in safety margins elsewhere. Pipelines are having to take higher pressure to increase profits. The programme to replace the old iron gas mains has been slowed down. The research station at Killingworth has three areas of responsibility connected with safety.

First, the Killingworth station contains the unit which monitors and identifies the risks involved in the non-renewal and maintenance of the old iron gas mains, some of which are now 100 years old. The real problem is the amount of disturbance to which those old mains are now subject. Cabling and the London docklands extension of the Jubilee line are creating great difficulties and problems for the old mains. All the work being done on that and on the safety risks is currently carried out at Killingworth.

Secondly, the work being conducted on the safety and security of supply in high-pressure transmission lines bringing gas from the landing points to the pressure reduction stations, to try to ensure that there is no serious escape, is mainly carried out by a team based at Killingworth. Thirdly, Killingworth is the base of the incidents team, who go out to investigate any pipe explosion to identify the error and to try to ensure that such mistakes do not happen again.

All that vital safety work is currently conducted at Killingworth, and it is being put at risk by the Government's proposals. The dedicated and highly motivated work force at Killingworth are to be the innocent victims of the Government's policies for the gas industry. The Bill is a triumph of political dogma over reason. It puts safety at risk and it will create many losers among gas consumers. For those reasons, the reasoned amendment is worthy of support today.

6.23 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) referred to the speech to be made

later tonight by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry. I have no doubt that it was entirely right that my right hon. Friend should have composed his speech somewhat ahead of the debate. The speech by the hon. Member for Wallsend was entirely predictable. It was full of doom and gloom, and everything that he could dredge up was thrown against the Bill. If ever there was a Bill that deserved to command a consensus, to be approached from an intelligent point of view and to be discussed in Committee, this Bill is it.

I suspect that few Opposition Members, including the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), actually read the report by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. If they had read the evidence, they would have been convinced, as we on the Committee were, that it was right and proper for the Government to press ahead now with the deregulation of the gas industry. The evidence was overwhelming and the conclusion that we reached was that the Government should go ahead with the Bill. I am, therefore, delighted that we are debating the Bill today. I assure the House that I shall vote enthusiastically for the Bill, not for reasons of political dogma—I happen to believe in privatisation—but because of the evidence presented to the Select Committee, which pointed overwhelmingly to the Bill being necessary in the interests of the consumer.

It will be interesting tonight to see where the Liberal Democrats stand on the issue. What are they going to do? Will they support the Labour party and go along with the old dogma of resisting and voting against any form of privatisation, irrespective of the proof of the pudding that has been eaten by the consumer, who has benefited so enormously from lower prices as a result of privatisation? The Liberal Democrats, just as much as the Labour party, are frightened of change. I suspect that if they do not vote with Labour, they will abstain as a means of keeping out of the decision-making process. It is all the more a pity for Parliament as a whole that we cannot join together and work in consensus, based on the hard evidence presented to the Select Committee.

Some 18 million consumers out there will benefit from lower prices. Some great words have been said about standing charges, a point that concerned the Committee. There is no doubt that standing charges will be reduced; Competition will have a major part to play because, as the licences are taken up, companies will be hungry to expand their territory for the provision of gas and to bring on board the smaller users. They will do so in a way that will encourage people to go for gas and to use gas. The companies will reduce standing charges as part of that promotion.

While the Select Committee took evidence, the subject of cherry-picking was exhaustively discussed. I am especially pleased that the Bill will ensure that suppliers are obliged to supply any customer in their licensed area. Surely that covers the point about some parts of the area not having large consumers and, therefore, being excluded. There is, however, a point about the geography of the licensed areas that will have to be addressed in Committee. The licensed areas must be comprehensive as opposed to just covering the areas where the better customers are and excluding those on the periphery.

Mr. Eggar *indicated assent.*

Mr. Banks: I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend nodding his head in agreement.

Safety is a very important factor. I have no doubt that it is sensible that safety throughout the United Kingdom should be in the hands of British Gas TransCo. It would be wrong to expect individual suppliers to set up their own teams and to make them available to rush out to deal with any emergency. There must be a comprehensive system to ensure that if a person suspects a leak in his gas supply, he can call a service which will be available immediately, irrespective of which supplier covers the territory. That has been agreed and accepted.

It is important, however, that we deal with electricity emergencies and water emergencies in the same way. We should have a single telephone number so that a consumer may ring 888, for example, and be able to get through to gas, electricity or water emergency services. I see no reason why we should not arrange such a service. It would be a simple process and invaluable if time were of the essence—as it often is with gas leaks—and one needed to get hold of the person at the other end of the line so that a team could quickly check the possible out-flow of gas. There is no reason why we should not be able to set up such an arrangement. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry certainly recommends the provision of one telephone number and it would be convenient to use that same number for calling out emergency services to deal with electricity and water as well.

Another matter is pipe installation work. Inevitably, certain pipes will have to be replaced and serviced from time to time and there may be a programme for replacement of gas pipelines in certain parts of the United Kingdom. I am concerned about whether the costs of pipeline work in specific areas will fall on the licence holder for that area, which could affect the prices charged for gas, or whether those costs would be subsumed in the whole programme of servicing pipes in the United Kingdom. It would be fair to assure consumers on that matter at this stage, rather than to leave them to discover subsequently that they happen to be in an area where much replacement pipe work is needed, which would increase the licence fee and mean that their gas prices would not equate with those of somebody in a neighbouring town. I hope that that question may be answered.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has referred to the cost of licences and I know that that matter will be addressed later in Committee. Some costs, however, as is explained in the memorandum, will be incurred by shippers of gas in meeting the obligations of their licences as well as in paying licence fees. The memorandum states:

> "It has not yet been possible to determine these costs as the precise terms of the licences and the commercial background to the obligations are not settled. However, the Government will be publishing the draft shipper's licence shortly and will consider the views of business before finalising the proposals."

I welcome very much the consultation between my right hon. Friend and representatives of the various companies which are potential suppliers. Indeed, British Fuels in my constituency has consulted members of my right hon. Friend's Department and I am grateful for the arrangements that have been made.

However, I am somewhat concerned that the small supplier may often be left out and that the draft proposals in the Bill, which were sent out to a number of gas producers, were not sent out to some of the smaller potential suppliers. It is important that we consult as

[Mr. Banks]

widely as possible so that we do not at any point exclude the small supplier from the chance of entering the market and from securing a fair deal on power along with the large suppliers.

The network code under consideration is relevant because it is feared in some sectors of the industry that British Gas, which will, after all, be in control of pipelining, will hold things up to the detriment of some of the smaller users. We have been assured that, by October 1995, British Gas will be in a position to deliver the systems required for the whole system to function. I should like to be further reassured that British Gas will be able to deal with pricing and with all the various balances that have to be facilitated to make the system work effectively, and that it will not militate against the smaller supplier wishing to enter the market.

Rates of daily input, for instance, will be part of the system which will have to be put in place. Billing for gas is another factor to consider, especially its time scale, which could have quite an effect on the smaller supplier which relies on 28 days or less—perhaps more if it can get it—to balance its books. We must ensure that the smaller supplier is not at a disadvantage in comparison to the very large supplier which can carry the weight of being billed for the necessary gas on a day-to-day basis. There needs to be a check so that the finances of the small supplier will not over-balance.

It is reasonable to assume that competition in the gas supply market will inevitably encourage—indeed, we want to encourage—people to consume more gas, but that militates against energy efficiency. That matter was raised in the Select Committee and one of the statements that emerged from the evidence given touched on a pertinent point and has always rested in my mind. I shall quote two sentences of the evidence given by the representative of Amerada Hess, Mr. Laidlaw. In reply to a question on energy efficiency, he said:

"What we are actually trying to do is secure the maximum number of customers. The way we can do that is actually to offer energy efficiency packages and we have already had, even though our plans are obviously just shaping up, a number of energy efficiency companies contact us with a view to preparing and offering a full energy efficiency package to the residential market."

That is a positive point and it is one of the exciting factors. The argument that energy efficiency will be sacrificed in the rush of people for cheaper gas has been overtaken by the fact that more people will be offered incentives to conserve their gas and to use more efficient appliances.

It is important that the published prices and tariffs are fully available from all the suppliers. In all fairness, the system must be transparent, so that people who have a grudge against it because they see the large users getting lower prices can see also the price tariffs that are open to everyone within the scope of the suppliers.

Having listened to the hon. Member for Wallsend, I wonder whether I am in the right country. The way in which he referred to the elderly and the disabled as being priced out and receiving rough treatment made me wonder what kind of people we are in this country. It is almost as though we have lost our ordinary basic common sense by believing that the world out there is a nation of people who want to do down the disadvantaged.

We do not have ruthless, heartless and unscrupulous business people in our nation. There are people out there who care about the disabled, the blind and the pensioners. They do not need to be told, or regulated, to care. They are perfectly capable of being perfectly reasonable in looking after those sectors of our society and our communities. It is an extraordinary fact of political life today that everyone believes that everything must be regulated because, if it is not, society will do down the weaker people. It is extraordinary that we cannot rely more on people's good nature and common sense to deal with those issues.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Is not the hon. Gentleman aware that, last week, share prices in the regional electricity companies collapsed because the regulator discovered that he had not been told that one of the electricity companies had something like £500 million tucked away in its books, which it could use as a defence mechanism, not to protect consumers, but to protect the directors of the board of the company concerned? That is going on all the time.

The regulator did not know the information because he had not been told. When he discovered it by chance, he took the opportunity to do something about it. Those are the kind of people who are making money out of the energy business. That is why so many of us are so suspicious of the people who want to get into the industry and why we believe that those people must be regulated far more severely than they are regulated at the moment.

Mr. Banks: We have one of the greatest energy businesses in the world. Our offshore exploration and drilling is second to none. British Gas has expanded abroad since privatisation and become one of the nation's great industries. I am sick and tired of hearing people trying to do down the managements which have gone out there and done something for this country. If we had not put the prospectors into the North sea, we would not be deriving the oil revenues that we enjoy and that help us to improve our standard of living. That has been achieved only by hiring the very best people and paying proper salaries so that they can get on and do the job effectively.

Having dealt with that point, I want to consider the question of consumers being able to link up to gas. I understand that there is an obligation in the legislation governing the fact that if a consumer wants to become part of the gas supply network, provided that gas can be made available, it will be possible for that consumer to do that. British Gas TransCo will be responsible for linking people into the system. In a sense, that provision seems to be unnecessary because it is in everyone's interest, obviously not least that of the gas companies, to get more users into the network.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman says that it is in everyone's interest. The village of Rosehearty in my constituency is less than 10 miles from the St. Fergus gas terminal, one of the largest gas terminals in Europe. The people of Rosehearty are being offered a connection to the British Gas pipeline service at the cost of £1,000 per household. Under those terms, is that not a rather theoretical right? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that one of the reasons why connection costs have risen so much is that British Gas argues that it now cannot use the previous

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connection formula because someone else could take over those connections after they have been connected at a high cost?

Mr. Banks: I am not aware of the specific circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman refers. However, he may be referring to the development of a housing estate where it is necessary to bring gas from quite a distance to service not just one consumer, but a clutch of consumers. I suspect that the £1,000 that the hon. Gentleman quoted may well relate to supplying a small or even medium-sized housing estate. That sum of money, spread among the different consumers, would be a perfectly reasonable price. Competition will certainly bring the price down.

Mr. Salmond: I was talking about a price per household. A few years ago, when British Gas could look over a much longer period in terms of connection prices, St. Fergus, a village similar to Rosehearty, was offered connections at £40 per household. Why, in the competitive world about which the hon. Gentleman is so enthusiastic, has the price risen from £40 to £1,000 per household?

Mr. Banks: I am always suspicious of figures like that. When we look into them, we find that they are not quite as they have been set out. The Bill introduces competition and it has been proved that competition forces prices down. The hon. Gentleman's case is the very case that we are making. We want to get prices down. The hon. Gentleman should vote for the Bill and ensure that there is a better deal for consumers and the new suppliers.

With regard to shippers, it is important that gas suppliers have equal treatment in respect of bringing gas into the system. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry to press for United Kingdom suppliers to have access to European markets for gas supplies. That will be the start of a process which will develop in the countries of our European partners, for example, in France and Germany, and it is important for us, as a supplying nation, to have access and to put our gas into those systems.

Recommendation 12 of the Trade and Industry Select Committee states that:

"The UK Government should continue to press for unimpeded rights for UK gas suppliers in foreign (especially EU) energy markets."

It is in Britain's interests to promote that.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make a speech in this debate. I most heartily welcome the measures incorporated in the Bill. I hope that it passes through Standing Committee quickly and that we get on with the job, and with the test that will take place.

6.47 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Any attempt to transform a monopolistic gas market into a competitive one, in which customers can choose for themselves from whom they wish to buy their gas, is a step in the right direction. For that reason, the Bill receives the broad support of the Liberal Democrats.

The Bill is based on the sound principle that competition gives consumers greater choice and, as such, should bring them benefits that a monopoly market will not deliver. However, what is less certain is whether the legislation is capable of transforming that sound principle into sound practice. To that end, we must consider two broad areas of concern to see whether there is adequate provision in the Bill to bring real, tangible benefits to consumers. The acid tests in that context are: will customers receive better service and will they be required to pay less? I shall look briefly at each of those matters.

First, will people receive a better service? Since privatisation, British Gas has had a fairly good record in customer services relative to other utilities. Recently, however, we have seen some worrying developments, such as leaked internal memos threatening to charge extra for services for the blind and the elderly, a sharp increase in the number of customer complaints and the beginning of preferential treatment not for prompt payers, but for prompt payers by direct debit. Some have suggested that the reason for those developments is the desire within British Gas to lower its costs to protect its interests in the run-up to competition.

Those are examples of the sort of problem which could arise within a more competitive market if suppliers were given the freedom to lower standards and to cherry-pick customers. Against that backdrop, the introductory list of duties for the Secretary of State on the one hand and the Director General on the other should include the protection of the interests of consumers as a primary duty, rather than—as is currently the case in the Bill—a subsidiary duty. Consumer benefit should not be seen as a fortunate consequence of competition, but rather the driving force behind it. Competition itself is the means, not the end.

As regards the specific service standards which will be required of all suppliers, we welcome very much the proposals put forward by one of the proposing suppliers to improve and enforce the current 39 standard requirements to which British Gas works. Polling has shown that standards of service are of great importance to customers, and those must be safeguarded against becoming victims of any frantic price war.

Service standards can be divided into two groups; those which are vital and others which are desirable. Vital services, such as safety provisions and services for the disabled and the elderly should be protected in law and applied fairly to all suppliers. Services which are desirable, but not in any sense life-threatening—answering the telephone promptly, for example—need not be enforced by law, but should be monitored by consumer groups whose findings should be published so that customers can have the information they need to make an informed choice of who they will get their gas supply from.

Balanced against the need for high levels of customer service is the need not to erect barriers to entry into the market which would inevitably lessen the scope of competition. So it is reasonable that only those requirements which are essential are backed up in legislation. However, there are some areas in which the Government's approach to liberalising the market—some of the more important provisos which are intended to be only in the licence rather than in the Bill—must be questioned. For some of the more central pillars of the market, legislation would be more appropriate than regulation. The duty to supply on request—as was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)—is an obligation in the Gas Act 1986 which is not to be found in the Bill.

[Mr. Nick Harvey]

Under the proposals, only the regulator will be able to ensure that disabled customers enjoy exactly the same protection as they have had in the past. By putting the provisions in the licence, the already pivotal role of the regulator is extended.

If people are to benefit properly from competition, good service must go hand in hand with lower prices. It has been suggested that since the savings promised by the independent suppliers are to be made at the customer end of the supply chain, it would be impossible for prices to fall if standards are to be maintained or improved. That is, by and large, a false thesis. Customer services need not in many instances be expensive, and there is no reason why service standards cannot be improved at the same time as prices are lowered. It must be said, however, that some of the claims being made about the degree of savings to be achieved are probably fanciful at the higher end.

As with service standards, the largest potential barrier to delivering financial benefits to customers is cherry-picking which, in this context, could take place on two levels—choice of area and choice of customers within an area. There must be safeguards against the possibility of competition flourishing only in areas near to gas sources, and also against competition reaching only the more cost-efficient customers within those areas.

Licences will need to cover large enough areas to be comprehensive, but—as the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) said—those areas must not be so large as unreasonably to restrict access for suppliers into the market. As with service agreements, if safeguards against price discrimination are only written into licences, an important check against unfair charging is open to modification in the future without parliamentary scrutiny.

On both counts—the quality of service and the level of pricing—it could be seen that customers who are the least cost-efficient from the suppliers' point of view risk missing the benefits of competition unless they are protected by the Bill as well as by the licences. If a pensioner in the west country has a significantly more restricted choice of supplier than an affluent family on the east coast, we could rightly say that the Bill had failed to establish the necessary structures to protect all consumers. Due to variations in transportation charges, benefits will vary from place to place, but we must ensure that all customers—no matter where they are from—get a gain of some sort.

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): The hon. Gentleman will, I presume, give unreserved support to the announcement last week that the south-west is to be the first of the pilot schemes, which will guarantee liberalisation and cost savings to that west country pensioner about whom he talks.

Mr. Harvey: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my next point. For the very reasons which he has outlined, the choice of the south-west for the pilot scheme is a good one. There will not just be an opportunity to see whether the computer systems work, but to see whether customers really will be better off under the new system. Once the Bill has undergone parliamentary scrutiny, it will be interesting to see whether the people of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset will enjoy the benefits for which everybody hopes.

Mr. Duncan: I have not been able to discern from what the hon. Gentleman has said whether he and his party will support the Government and vote for Second Reading of the Bill. Will he confirm that that is his intention?

Mr. Harvey: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will not sit down and leave him disappointed. I shall come to that point presently.

I shall finish the point that I was making about the experiment in the south-west. If the Government are as confident as they appear to be about the proposals, will they consider offering a guarantee to consumers in the south-west who are to be used as guinea pigs in the trial? The south-west has suffered disproportionately from utility costs during the past few years, and the Government should offer a guarantee that—should the system not work as they hope—they will offer compensation.

Mr. Eggar: I am confused by what the hon. Gentleman says. When the pilot scheme goes ahead in the west country, there will be no obligation on the consumer to move from British Gas if he does not want to move. That fact underpins the whole pilot scheme.

Mr. Harvey: I understand the Minister's point. For that reason, it must be seen that it is unlikely in most circumstances that anyone will lose in absolute terms. The acid test will be whether some consumers lose out in relative terms either within a region or, more probably, between different regions of the country.

The Standing Committee will have an opportunity to look at the issues—including many of the points which the Opposition have made in their amendment—in great detail. But the principle of the Bill of extending competition is right and, for that reason, we will support its Second Reading.

6.58 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I was brought up in a world in which the basic household services—electricity, gas, telephones and water—were all provided by public service utilities. I was born after electricity and gas were originally nationalised so I knew nothing else.

Mr. Nigel Evans: What, after electricity was invented?

Mr. Merchant: I can assure my hon. Friend that I was also born after the original gas monopoly was set up, surprising though it may seem to him.

While I have always been a believer in private enterprise and competition, I was not instinctively led in the direction of applying such an approach to the services. Certainly, any suggestion at the time that the Labour party might in some way support such an idea would have been stupendous. I suspect that some of the old Labour stalwarts of the era must be spinning rather swiftly in their graves at the idea that the Labour party should, as it appears to be doing, smile on the idea of competition in the provision of such services—in this case, gas.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers). He told the House that competition was necessary and that there was always a presumption in favour of competition. They are welcome words indeed,

but not ones that would have chimed well with the old approach of the Labour party. It is good to welcome members of the Labour party into the real world and see them accept in the House the importance of competition and, indeed, the vital role that it plays in modern society.

The hon. Member for Wallsend somewhat spoilt his speech by going on to advance a thesis that appeared to say that everything had to be regulated. I wonder exactly how competition can operate if regulation is so severe and all-encompassing that those who are in competition can hardly move or vary from a set pattern. The hon. Gentleman also said that, on balance, he had doubts about the Bill for practical reasons. He seemed to say that he went along with most of it but that there were practical problems in it and, for that reason, he would support the reasoned amendment. He finished by saying that he opposed the Bill because it was dogmatic in its base; yet he had accepted its basic principle. I found a considerable amount of contradiction in what he said.

The other point that I picked up from the remarks of the hon. Member for Wallsend was his reference to cross-subsidy, which he described as socialism in action. That struck me as strange because cross-subsidy is an essential part of a competitive system. Anyone who goes to supermarkets—hardly part of the state sector—will see cross-subsidy in operation in the pricing structures of the goods within that market. It is an essential part of the system.

The hon. Member for Wallsend advanced a thesis based on scare stories. That was sad because he had already conceded the importance of competition. I was sorry that he could not take himself a further step and accept the benefits of the Bill, even if he had doubts about one or two sections that could have been dealt with in Committee.

I also listened with interest to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), to whom I always listen with great pleasure. He is an eloquent espouser of his cause, but I felt that on this occasion he was more eloquent in making a case where in fact there was none. He seemed to have lost his basic fire. I suspect that he was caught in a position in which he had no principled base on which to oppose the Bill. So he scratched around trying to find justification for opposing it.

The right hon. Gentleman conceded early in his speech any basic principle of objection. He constructed a case based purely on the weaknesses that he thought existed in parts of the structure, rather than the underlying concepts of the Bill, or on scare stories similar to those that we heard, as my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Sir M. Grylls) pointed out, about other privatisation measures that have come before the House in recent years.

I said at the beginning of my speech that I had been brought up in a world in which there was only state provision of basic services. I had always supported denationalisation. It seemed sensible to denationalise the manufacturing industries such as steel, and services such as buses and road freight. Indeed, I witnessed when I was fairly young the creation of private broadcasting companies. I have to admit that in the early days I shared the doubts that are now being expressed by the Labour party about privatisation of some of the services. For me it was a journey into unknown territory. I was influenced by popular theories that were around at the time about a mixed economy and the prevalent economic theories that natural monopolies had to be run by the state so that consumers were protected, which could not be provided by competition or the private sector.

Indeed, I had some misgivings when British Telecom was first privatised. I wondered whether it would work. I wondered whether it was a suitable service to be privatised. I felt that, if it were privatised, it should at least be broken up. I reasoned that surely a private monopoly was even worse than a public one because it had no accountability. However, with hindsight I realised that the doubts that I had at the time were not justified. For that reason, I am utterly confident in the Bill. I base that view not on any dogmatic approach but on my belief that it represents practical reality—the same practical reality as made privatisation of BT and subsequent privatisations work.

Privatisation has turned out, perhaps to the surprise of many people, to be one of the most brilliant, radical and successful developments in public policy in this half-century. British Telecom was the forerunner, but it is entirely right that gas should follow in its footsteps. As a service, British Telecom showed the way in the complex change of ownership and organisation of a whole industry. That process had to be taken in steps.

My second original reservation about the privatisation of British Telecom was about the need to break it up. It was not broken up. I now realise that that would have been a mistake. It was correct to take the privatisation in stages because the operation was complex and it represented such a fundamental change.

Mr. Salmond: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's personal experiences. Has he spoken to any British Gas shareholders recently? If he has, will he estimate for the House whether they are enamoured with the activities of the company?

Mr. Merchant: I expect that I have spoken to many British Gas shareholders because so many exist. As it happens, I have not discussed the matter to which I think the hon. Gentleman refers, of British Gas and its activities, but the hon. Gentleman is an intelligent enough person to realise that anyone who owns shares will change his views from one moment to the next about the efficiency and effectiveness with which the management of a company operates. I am sure that that is true of British Gas, as it is of any other company. That is an entirely good thing because it puts the company and its management under continual pressure. They have to be answerable to their shareholders. If the shareholders are unhappy with one particular aspect of the management's reign, the shareholders will take action.

The three stages of this type of privatisation process are as follows. The first step is transforming a state-owned company to a private monopoly, which of course is regulated to ensure that it operates generally in the interests of its consumers. The second step is to introduce some competition. Both those stages have taken place with British Gas. The third step is to transfer as far as possible the operations into that of a fully competitive market. That is what the Bill is about. That is why I welcome it and support it in its entirety. I have no doubt that that is the right approach. It is the logical conclusion of what has already been done with the gas industry. Its timing is right. The timing set within its clauses for the move towards full competition is also right. It is a step at

[Mr. Merchant]

a time, not a "leap in the dark", as the right hon. Member for Copeland called it earlier. It is a measured step at a time which will achieve its objective.

If we think back to the old days of the state-run gas industry, we remember the gross inefficiency as well as the total lack of real accountability to the consumer and the "gas man cometh" stories. We remember the jokes about the gas board and its failure to respond to consumer inquiries and complaints. Indeed, speaking some weeks ago in a debate on the citizens charter, I alluded to my experience many years ago as a journalist, when the paper that I worked for had a department called Action Desk, which was designed to help members of the public with consumer problems. Within a few weeks of opening, Action Desk was completely flooded out by complaints about British Gas, to the exclusion of any other complaints.

Such stories are well known in the public domain. Everyone remembers the poor standards and everyone can see the huge improvement in efficiency that has taken place since. Of course, the system is not perfect and there are still complaints and problems. What area of activity in the retail or service trades does not occasionally have problems?

A simple look at the available statistics will demonstrate how dramatic the change has been. For example, supply restored has increased by leaps and bounds and is now up to 99.5 per cent. within 24 hours. There are special arrangements, such as Gas Care, which did not exist before, and arrangements for the elderly. People can now pay their bills at about 19,000 post offices, instead of only at the rather limited number of gas show rooms. Since privatisation in 1986, there has been a drop of about 20 per cent. in the real price. The drop has been about 35 per cent. for industry.

Equally crucially, investment increased around threefold in that period. It varies between £1.3 billion and £2.2 billion a year, which is a huge amount and benefits not merely consumers, but the economy of the country as a whole. British Gas has been enabled to become a truly international player in energy, with activities in 45 different countries, exploration in 25 countries and supply in countries as wide apart as Argentina and India. That is a remarkable achievement and it shows the sort of business that can be built up, once the shackles of state control are lifted and the company is allowed to compete and to invest.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): My hon. Friend has obviously been watching those rather strange television advertisements about the international achievements of British Gas. Is not the key point that, whereas it is sometimes suggested that there is a conflict between the interests of shareholders and customers, British Gas has been so successful in driving down its costs and increasing productivity in a relatively short time that both customers and shareholders have benefited from privatisation?

Mr. Merchant: Absolutely. My hon. Friend is entirely correct. People who oppose the enterprise system or privatisation try to drive wedges between what they see as various competing interest groups in the industrial structure; but those groups are not competing. It is in all their interests to go in the same direction, just as discounts for people who pay their bills by direct debit, which the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) mentioned, are in the interests of both sides. People ask why discounts are not extended to people who pay by cash and do not have bank accounts and British Gas has said that it will also extend them to those people, for a simple reason—it is in the interests of both sides for that to happen. It is in the interests of British Gas to encourage swift payment and a discount is in the interests of the payer. That is the beauty of the system; it works in the interests of all.

I was discussing the benefits that have already flowed. Further benefits will flow if the argument is continued. If competition is brought fully into the provision of domestic gas, all of the price, quality and investment benefits that I have outlined will also improve and the customers will have choice—that essential weapon that enables them to change from one supplier to another if they are discontented, or to choose one supplier in preference to another if they feel that what they are offered is better. That also operates in the interests of both sides; the consumer gets a better deal, better quality and better prices and the supplier has continually to improve and review its operations to maintain its market share when in competition.

It is also important to maintain some regulation, which is essentially what the Bill is about. The licences are about ensuring that the triple operations of supply, shipping and transport are carried out in a way that will ensure the success of the whole operation. I am glad about the split, which is a natural one. It too will ensure that the consumer is protected.

Sufficient protections are built into the Bill to prevent cherry picking and to ensure safety and the provision of special services, such as those to the elderly. The detail must come in the licence, as it would not be appropriate for a Bill to include all the detail that must necessarily appear in a licence. The Bill rightly sets up the framework in which the licence is produced. The licence will contain the conditions, but the Bill clearly steers the structure of the licence in the right direction.

Someone commented on tariffs—I think it was the right hon. Member for Copeland—but they will also be sorted out by the market, as long as sufficient regulation is present. I favour light regulation, but I clearly favour regulation and do not want a complete free for all, as we would then lose some safeguards, especially as competition develops. It is unnecessary to go into the detail of tariffs in a licence, let alone in a Bill, because that will be worked out with competition. That is also true of services, such as the repair of appliances, for which there is already a healthy private market.

The principle of the Bill is excellent and the practice is thorough and realistic. It is thoughtfully worked through and takes care of the detail, yet maintains a tough regulatory environment. It introduces full competition in three phases, which is sensible timing. There is not a mad rush that might result in things becoming unhinged early on, but it is not put off to such an extent that all consumers will have to wait for an eternity to benefit.

For all those reasons, the 18 million gas consumers will benefit considerably from the Bill. I support it strongly for that practical reason. I am very eager that my constituents should receive the benefits as soon as possible, so I wish it a hasty passage through the House.

7.17 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): The Gas Act 1986 created a private monopoly in the domestic sector, whose abuses were to be checked by a gas regulator. It has been a highly successful company, but the Bill is an admission by the regulator and the Government that it has not worked for customers. The new Bill is relying on competition to do what the 1986 Act failed to do, but the big question is, will it do it?

There have been problems with the regulator and one of the disappointing aspects of the Bill is that it does not take the opportunity to rectify those problems. The Bill, as well as the 1986 Act, gives the regulator a duty to protect the interests of gas consumers, but that is subject to other duties, including that of securing effective competition. I suppose that one might ask which gas consumers she is there to protect. To assume that gas consumers are an entity is to misunderstand what people out there are about.

The Bill gives no clearer definition of the regulator's duties, which is a serious problem. When the actions of the first regulator are compared with those of the second, one is hard pushed to accept that they have the same job description. Therein lies the problem, because part of the definition of their duties is a self-definition. The phrase, "public interest", is, in an independent, non-political arena, totally meaningless. Such a wide definition of duties inevitably means that the regulator is seen to operate within a political arena. How can she not, given that gas is a political issue and every action that she takes has political consequences? Lack of accountability—the gas regulator is accountable to no one—does not necessarily equal independence.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Lady said that the gas regulator is accountable to no one. The Gas Act 1986 provides that the Director General of Gas Supply is accountable directly to Parliament.

Ms Coffey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I have yet to see how that takes place. The regulator comes to the Select Committee, as the hon. Gentleman says, but is not accountable to it. The Select Committee cannot direct the regulator what to do. In a previous debate on the regional electricity companies, the Minister took great pains to point out that the regulator was independent and had independent duties.

The relationship between the Secretary of State and the regulator is also murky. The regulator advises the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State may take that advice or not. The Bill gives the Secretary of State a veto concerning referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I presume that the Government's view is that they may as well give the Secretary of State that power because it will save them rejecting the MMC's findings once it has reported. However, it does not help the idea of a credible, independent regulator and it is a great pity that the Bill did not take the opportunity to begin the process of looking again at the duties and accountability of the regulator, who is very powerful and has great responsibilities and duties to perform.

The gas, electricity and water regulators sometimes act inconsistently. Perhaps that is supposed to demonstrate some independence, but, like the MMC, which also shows such a tendency, it can lead to much confusion. Unless there is a stricter remit, we shall be faced with a myriad of gas companies and a great deal of confusion. Last week, the electricity regulator, for example, suddenly discovered unknown cash reserves in regional electricity companies. Coincidentally, Norweb directors made £1 million by selling their share options a few days before the electricity regulator announced his decision to review prices. Perhaps they felt able to take their reward as they had performed so brilliantly in hiding from the regulator the extent of Norweb's cash reserves; or perhaps the matter throws a new light on performance-related pay or a corporate response to selling share options.

If the Minister is seriously trying to set up a level playing field, why does he not set up TransCo as a legally separate company? If TransCo remains within British Gas, it will create difficulties in terms of transparency and ensuring that extra costs are not passed on to competing gas companies through standing charges. It will also be difficult to ensure that chief executives' high salaries are not passed on to competing gas companies. In essence, making the standing charge cost-reflective will depend on the regulator. As the regulator seems to have had some difficulty in lowering British Gas prices and ensuring better management in the company, there is not much cause for optimism.

Another disappointing aspect of the Bill is its scant regard for energy conservation. At this point, I should say that I am co-chair of the British parliamentary lighting group. As the Minister is probably aware, the group is anxious to install low-energy light bulbs for obvious reasons, but those involve a capital cost. Although the Bill places a new duty on the Secretary of State and the regulator to take account of the effect on the physical environment, and licences will require all gas suppliers to provide energy efficiency advice to their domestic customers, it is not clear where the money will come from for energy conservation measures such as insulation, which is important because it allows people on low incomes to heat their houses for less money. It would have been helpful if the Bill had been clearer about how that would be managed.

Low-income customers are the most expensive to supply in relation to their demand, particularly customers on pre-payment meters. I approve of pre-payment meters as an alternative to disconnection, but those who use them currently pay 12 per cent.—I hesitate to mention the figure—more than those on direct debit. So those who can afford to pay least for their gas pay more. How will competition help them? Much of what we have heard is simply speculation, as no one knows whether the standing charge will come down. What is not speculation is the fact that cross-subsidy by British Gas helps low-income customers to some extent. In the short term, therefore, cost-reflective pricing will raise the cost of gas to those customers.

Not all customers are the same, nor are their interests, and British Gas has ably demonstrated that with its discount to direct debit customers. That discrimination can continue because it is a saving offered on an administrative cost, but pre-payment customers will not benefit from such a saving. British Gas made a pre-emptive strike at "cherry picking" because direct debit customers are attractive. Moreover, they are likely to be offered further administrative savings, so competition will without doubt benefit them. The bottom line is that they will get their gas more cheaply than those on pre-payment meters.

[Ms Coffey]

Irrespective of what the independent gas suppliers say, I do not believe that low-income pre-payment customers are an attractive proposition. They are likely to continue to pay higher prices while better-off customers benefit. The gas companies cannot refuse to supply them, but I doubt whether that group of customers will leaf through the "Yellow Pages" to find another gas supplier. People in that group probably have no telephone as they cannot afford the connection charge or have had their telephone disconnected. The independent companies probably know that those people will not ask them to supply them, and that they can afford to target better-off customers. So who will ensure that pre-payment customers benefit? The regulator obviously has some remit in the matter, but the interpretation of her duties is wide. The DTI said in its response to the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry:

"We accept that by the very nature of competition there must be some uncertainty as to the scale and distribution of benefits".

That is true. It is at present a matter of speculation.

It is worth remembering that the supply of energy to the poor and needy is a social responsibility. It is ultimately a Government responsibility. It is not the responsibility of the market and delivery cannot be made by the market. In those terms, the Bill will not deliver. If the Bill will not deliver, what will? I have not heard what or who will deliver. Have we reached a state where gas has become just another commodity, a situation in which if someone has the money he will be supplied with gas, and if he has not, he will not? If that is the state to which we have come, it is not good enough.

7.30 pm

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): I approach the debate with a feeling of deja vu, and I am interested in the division of attitude that has already been established across the Chamber towards the Bill. I am interested also in the revisionist historians who are packing the Opposition Benches. I accept that I must be careful because the Liberal Democrat spokesman this evening has shown some enlightened approaches to the Bill.

As Opposition Members are busily rewriting the history of privatised industry in the 1980s, it is worth reminding the House that in 1979 publicly owned companies were costing the taxpayer about £50 million a week. The newly privatised companies, which were lauded as public sector operations by Opposition Members, are now contributing about £50 million a week in taxes. I suggest to Opposition Members that we should not be manning the barricades over the new-found profits of recently turned private companies. Instead, we should be saying that these companies are not contributing enough and that it is necessary to push for more. We should be seeking higher levels of profit, with which will go a considerable tax take. Last year, British Gas made a tax contribution of about £500 million. When the Government came to power, British Leyland and other clapped-out public sector industries were not making massive contributions to the welfare state through the tax take.

I sense that Opposition Members are merely going through the motions. They no longer believe in the nostrums that they were brought up to espouse. It is interesting that weekend after weekend we witness one policy U-turn after another. A few weeks ago there was the acceptance of education league tables. Apparently the Labour party suddenly came to the conclusion that opted-out schools were not a disaster for the British people, or even for key members of the party. I read with great interest today that we are about to be confronted by a Labour U-turn on private health.

I rather fancy that before the next general election, when the Labour party has sorted out the words that it hopes will get it through on clause IV, privatisation will be well and truly enshrined in its policy.

I welcome the Bill for all the reasons that have been identified by my right hon. and hon. Friends. They go beyond the mechanistic reasons that centre on the opening up of the market, the sensible opening of North sea supplies and the availability of pipelines to companies other than British Gas. We know that as a result clear benefits will accrue to about 18 million consumers.

The Bill is to be welcomed because it represents an extension of the Conservative party's belief that at the centre of policy must lie consumer choice and sovereignty. If we ever walk away from that as a concept or philosophy—I am sure that it is one in which Opposition Members believe, although they would implement it differently from us—we shall be selling consumers short. The Bill offers the freeing of a market. It continues the downward pressure on utility costs.

The consumer does not regard price as the only touchstone of a service. He or she will have regard to a range of other factors. I am pleased that enshrined in the Bill are sensible provisions for disabled people. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has given a commitment to take account of the interests of blind people. The Bill contains provisions for the elderly, for those about whom the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) talked. We know that there are pensioners who might find life difficult. The provisions to which I am referring are sensible, central and integral to the proposed legislation, as are those that relate to safety. Perhaps it is a liberty to speak on behalf of Opposition Members, but I think that there is broad agreement that such provisions are key tenets of the Bill.

I have spoken in the House on many occasions about the importance of inward investment into Great Britain plc and into our peripheral regions. Inward investment is the lifeline of the economics of peripherality. If it is important as a general concept, it is a supply of oxygen in an area such a Cornwall.

For some in my constituency, life is a hard-pressed existence. Average incomes are significantly lower in Cornwall than in other parts of the country for a myriad of reasons, including structural changes within the economy. If inward investment is to mean anything tangible in my constituency, we must have regard to the decision-making processes in boardrooms the length and breadth of the country, in Europe and even wider afield. Areas will be selected where there is seen to be a sensible business return.

Cornwall has been successful in attracting inward investment. I can think of two or three notable examples over the past year or so. At Redruth, Contico plastics, an American-owned multinational company, decided to set up its European manufacturing base. It had trawled Europe before coming to that decision. It was not a happy accident. The company decided to establish its base at

Redruth because of a flexible, well-educated, committed and loyal work force. It did so also because of our belief that businesses should not be saddled with overly burdensome regulations.

Central to any future investment decisions are the costs that are likely to be faced through utility charges. That is why I welcome unreservedly, as I did last week, the decision to use the south-west of England for the first pilot scheme. It will produce dramatic downward pressure on the cost of gas supplies to consumers. That is nothing new in commerce. There were reductions of between 10 and 15 per cent. in the cost of gas supplies to businesses. I am pleased that there are potential advantages for household consumers of anything between 10 and 15 per cent. I hope that the assessments are right. I would settle for even less than those percentages. It must be a move in the right direction. For the heart, the vibrancy and the economic base of Cornwall and the rest of the south-west of England it is vital that we maintain downward pressure on utility costs and charges, which, in my constituency, take up an inordinate amount of disposable income.

The proposed legislation is sensible. I am sure that it will be treated sensibly in Committee. I have great pleasure in supporting it this evening and I will support it on Third Reading. I commend it to my constituents, whom I know will be looking to many of the pieces of the Bill tonight to produce real advantages for them in their businesses and their domestic households.

7.39 pm

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I addressed many of our prime concerns about the proposed legislation in November when I spoke during a debate on the Gracious Speech. Since then, few people in the country can be unaware of the bad smell surrounding British Gas: the stench of corporate greed with orbiting fat cat salaries for those at the top; share options showering like Smarties; and bonuses that beggar belief. The Government might like to pretend that it is nothing to do with them—the "It's not me, guv" simpleton expression that they assume when their chickens come home to roost. But the people of this country are not stupid. They know who was responsible for privatising British Gas. They know that their money is paying for these outrages. They know that the Bill will not lead to lower prices for most of them, just reductions for those who are most able to afford to pay and relatively more expensive gas for the least well off. It is called "cherry picking". It happened in health—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should listen, because they might learn something tonight. It happened in health, where general practitioners do not want the most expensive patients on their fundholding lists. It happened in education, where schools are selecting pupils who will be the least troublesome, and it has happened in gas supply already, where British Gas now has an extra 1 million customers paying by direct debit since it announced that there would be a 5 per cent. discount for "good" payers last November.

The Bill is seriously flawed—

Mr. Eggar: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Church: I shall certainly give way to the Minister.

Mr. Eggar: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. Will she tell us whether she opposes her constituents who are paying less for their gas, because they have voluntarily opted to pay by direct debit, thereby saving money, or is she in favour of them paying 5 per cent. more for their gas than they do at present.

Ms Church: I very much welcome the fact that a number of my constituents in Dagenham are now able to pay by direct debit and get a saving on their gas—*[Interruption.]* I must tell the Minister that, in my constituency, far fewer people than in his constituency or those of other Conservative Members are able on economic grounds to take advantage of paying by direct debit. It is our constituents who are suffering from the changes in the pricing structure of British Gas. It is our constituents who will suffer as a result of the Gas Bill. I welcome the Minister's intervention, because I welcome the opportunity to tell the people of this country just what the Bill will mean for them.

The Bill is seriously flawed—*[Interruption.]* The Minister may laugh, but he will find out what the flaws are soon enough. That does not worry Conservative Members, a good many of whom—one can see it already in their faces—will not be here after the next general election, when these measures come into full force in 1998, when the so-called competition takes off. Others among them who may be here after 1998—I doubt whether there will be so many of them—know that they will be sitting on the Opposition side of the House. Labour Members know that we will be sitting over there, picking up the pieces if this flawed Bill becomes law. We know how difficult it will be to address the inequities that the Bill will introduce.

The *Financial Times* leader of 3 March summarised the situation perfectly when it said that the

"Bill leaves too much of importance to the suppliers' licence, and so to the interpretation of the Regulator. It has placed an extra burden on the utilities' regulatory regime, at a point when its achievements and powers are already under question . . . In particular, the implications for pricing remain obscure."

It would be churlish not to welcome the Government's climbdown from their much-heralded free market dogma, when clause 6(6), to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) has already referred, states:

"The area of the licence may not artificially exclude an undue proportion of premises likely to be owned or occupied by elderly persons or persons who are disabled or who are likely to default on the payment of charges."

The key question, however, is what will be considered as artificial? Will it be considered as artificial if firms choose to supply only to the wealthier cities or boroughs, or if they choose to ignore regions of high unemployment or choose only the areas that give the highest returns? The fact is that the two objectives—protecting the poor and promoting competition—are absolutely irreconcilable. In a competitive environment, profits can be made only by attracting the custom of the wealthy while opting out of the more costly accounts of the less well-off. Wait and see. It is already happening.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I am enjoying the hon. Lady's rant, but what would she say to the people who have heard all

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

this before? The Labour party came up with the same fears about British Telecom, saying that the poor who use public telephone boxes would not be able to use them because they would not be working, that no more would be installed and that the costs would go through the roof. The opposite has happened.

Ms Church: And Conservative Members never listen, so we shall continue telling them. The hon. Gentleman does not know it, but my constituency has fewer people connected to the BT service than in almost the entire country. Why? Because they cannot afford the cost of connection to the service.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): And installation costs are the highest in Europe!

Ms Church: I thank my hon. Friend for his assistance.

For the Government to deny that simple market truth is either plain incompetence or, at worst, a calculated deception. Because the specific terms have been left to the suppliers' licences rather than being included in primary legislation, the role of the regulator is critical to the market. Yet I was shocked last week to hear the Director General of Gas Supply maintain that it was her premise that she should not be mixed up in politics. Unfortunately for Mrs. Spottiswoode, she is mixed up in politics—all consumers are not equal, but they all need gas. She should shut herself away with Orwell's "Animal Farm". Perhaps after that she might realise that some gas consumers are more equal than others—but not many of them in Dagenham, I fear.

The regulator cannot escape the fact that her decisions, her actions or her failure to act will affect the lives of people throughout the country. A regulator is not some hidden hand in a virtual world of licences, technical jargon and "undue proportions". A regulator is affecting the real world, the real lives and the real hardship of the British people.

Cross-subsidy is not some evil, unmentionable disease. It is about gas supply and fair gas pricing.

Mr. Tim Smith: Has the hon. Lady noticed that, since the regulator was established some seven years ago, the effect of the regulator's activities on the people whom she has been describing has been to reduce gas prices by 20 per cent. in real terms? Is that not a benefit to consumers?

Ms Church: Much of any gain that has been made has, of course, been made by the better off at the expense of the worse off. Relatively, the price of gas has fallen more for the better off than for poorer people. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Hon. Members must believe that. It is due to the price structure that British Gas has introduced, which the Bill will perpetuate. *[Interruption.]* I shall explain—very simply, because the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) clearly still does not understand. If people are able to pay their bills by direct debit, because they are wealthy and have a lot of money in their bank accounts, they will pay less per therm than my constituents in Dagenham, who cannot pay by direct debit because they have no money in their bank accounts. I am sorry that Conservative Members do not understand that, but it is a fact.

Mr. Nigel Evans: As the hon. Lady knows, British Gas has already said that a discount will be available as soon as possible to those who pay in cash and on time.

Ms Church: Many of my constituents in Dagenham cannot pay their bills on time, because they are trying to pay for school meals, electricity and food from the local supermarket. They are living on income support—living at subsistence level—and they cannot afford to pay their bills on time. Many, indeed, have prepayment meters and find it very difficult to make the payments. So what do they do? They turn their heating off. *[Interruption.]* I will continue, if the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) will let me. These are important points, and I am grateful to Conservative Members for giving me a chance to spell out the position because they do not understand.

Cross-subsidy and the obligations that we owe our fellow citizens do not bring tears to the eyes of Conservative Members. We should not be surprised at that, because they have spent 16 years widening the gap between rich and poor—committing increasing numbers of our children to living in poverty, and in cold and damp houses where their young lives are blighted by illness. I know that, because I see them in my surgeries every week. Conservative Members do not understand that mutual obligation, and do not recognise the society in which I want my children to grow up.

Undoubtedly, all this strikes Conservative Members as being a long way from the technicalities of the Gas Bill. That only demonstrates how little they understand or care about the consequences of their policies. Last week, the Director General of Gas Supply said of British Gas's gas care register, the free safety checks and British Gas's safety record:

"Some of it is right and we don't want to put that at risk".

But what will be put at risk by the Bill? I should like to look at the gas care register of elderly and disabled people. As British Gas puts it, there will be

"extra help for those who need it".

British Gas now has 160 home service advisers, one for each 150,000 customers. Their job includes making home visits to provide—free—adapter devices, advice on gas use and advice on cooking for some of the most vulnerable people in society. I gained first-hand experience of the value of such support services last Friday when I accompanied Erika Aldridge, a home service adviser, on a visit to an elderly disabled customer in Dagenham. She was offered a contour tap to enable her to ignite the sole means of heating in her small bungalow; for years she had not been able to turn it on properly, and lately she had not been able to click the switch into the ignition position.

The tap was not simply handed to that woman with the words "Grandma, get on with it." Erika Alridge kindly helped and encouraged her to use it, and after three or four attempts she was able not only to turn on the gas for her fire but to click on the ignition. As she did that, on her own, her face lit up with joy: she would no longer have to depend on a 70-year-old neighbour to come in every morning and help her light the fire. On that

occasion, I also found out about "bumpons" and "knobbles". The Minister looks puzzled; I give way to him.

Mr. Eggar: I am well aware of the various services that are provided. The hon. Lady, however, does not appear to be aware that the terms of the licence will place on independent gas suppliers a similar obligation to that currently placed on British Gas. What is she going on about?

Ms Church: The Minister is making my point for me. If those obligations are so important to elderly and disabled British Gas customers—which they are—why is the provision not in the Bill? Why has it been stuck in the licence, with the result that adherence to the licence conditions will depend on the regulator?

Mr. Eggar: I am sorry to keep interrupting the hon. Lady. The reason is simple: the obligations currently imposed on British Gas by the Gas Act 1986 are also imposed in the licence. We are simply following precedent.

Ms Church: For decades, British Gas has carefully built up a professional service, but we know that the independent suppliers will not do that, because it would cost a lot of money. The idea of social responsibility in the provision of an essential service such as gas, the notion that there is a large social benefit to be gained from ensuring that our needy citizens are well looked after and the basic principle that we are one nation with mutual obligations and responsibilities are entirely alien to Conservative Members.

The Minister needs to know that professionals like Erika do not come cheap. British Gas employs only people with degrees in home economics, and gives them substantial training. Not everyone has the right combination of personal qualities and technical competence to do such work. Given the cost—and there will be a huge on-cost—does anyone seriously think that the same standard of service will be provided by the independents? Where will be the incentive, in a competitive environment, to provide such service for the most costly and least sought-after customers? The Government have dramatically increased the number of elderly people living in the so-called "care in the community" system; they must understand that such policies elicit certain obligations.

The flaws in the Bill are too numerous to mention, but some questions need answers from the President of the Board of Trade. *[Interruption.]* The energy consultants Gas Strategies reported last week—the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) obviously has not read the report yet—that

"Significant imbalances between supply and demand are likely to lead to price instability."

What safeguards will there be for the consumer? The consultants also stated:

"It is inevitable that some of the thirty or so companies will pull out or be forced out of the gas business as it evolves."

What proof of the financial strength will the regulator require before granting a licence? Will the regulator act promptly to deal with suppliers who take a chance in an unstable market and end up with no gas to supply? Will the regulator ensure that the price is directly related to the cost of supply for all new entrants? At what point will there be considered to be enough competition for the imposition of a levy to cross-subsidise and protect the more expensive customers?

Why cannot the fundamental duty to supply be laid down in the Bill itself rather than in the licences? As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) pointed out, how can the regulator be considered to have adequate powers and independence when the Secretary of State can veto a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

The Bill is another measure that is entirely consistent with the Government's record: it will fatten up the rich at the expense of the poor. We all know, however, that it will be another nail in the coffin of this Tory Government—a coffin that is now well nailed down. The President of the Board of Trade thinks that he can get the Bill past the British people without a murmur of protest by promising lower gas prices, but he is wrong—and, at the next general election, he and his Government will find out just how wrong.

7.59 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) has given a lively and spirited performance which will earn rave reviews, at least from Conservative Members. We could not but perceive from her endearing little chuckles in the middle of her speech that part of it was a bit of an act. One does not have to go to a west end theatre for such an excellent performance but I fear that the theme of her speech and those of her hon. Friends cast them all as prophets of doom and gloom. Opposition Members were nit-picking rather than cherry-picking.

Ms Church: The hon. Gentleman has no sense of humour.

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Lady says that I have no sense of humour but I assure her that I enjoyed every moment of her speech and I congratulate her on it. I shall enjoy reading it.

In debating the Bill, the hon. Member for Dagenham and her colleagues have not been able to tell the wood from the trees. There are great advantages in the continuing advance of competition, and challenging the whole principle will deny to her and to my constituents the benefits offered by the gas and other industries.

The House will be aware of my interest in oil. Two years ago, that interest spread to an interest in gas. The Minister will remember the small private Member's Bill that I piloted, aimed at deregulating the supply of gas to caravans. The regulations so liked by the hon. Member for Dagenham were stopping the sensible supply through pipes of butane and propane gas. Thanks to the co-operation of the Minister and the procedures in the House that apply on Fridays, caravan owners can now benefit from the supply of gas piped from tanks. We are moving from basically the same principles to a larger operation.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): The hon. Gentleman mentioned an interest in gas. Do he or any of his hon. Friends—perhaps I should more accurately say how many

[Mr. Peter Hain]

of them—have an interest in the competitor companies that will be invited into the market on such favourable terms as those in the Bill?

Mr. Duncan: I am not aware of any such details. I am here to debate the principles of the legislation, not to listen to the usual complaints by the hon. Gentleman.

Some 30 years ago, Britain was principally fuelled by coal and oil and only partly by gas. It is now fuelled by oil, gas and coal, and the increase in production of North sea oil, much of which I say to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) was not Scottish, coincided with the rise of Britain as a gas-producing country. In 1965, offshore gas had a mere 7 per cent. share of the market for energy. It is now 50 per cent.

The discovery, production and supply of gas has been a great success story and as the industry expanded, the nationalised company of the time could not cope with it. The Gas Act 1986 started the process of denationalisation. Inevitably, when transferring a massive nationalised concern with millions of household consumers to ownership by shareholders, there is a period of transition during which the nature and identity of the business is essentially a half-way house between nationalisation and full privatisation. It was right that in managing that transition, the Government ensured a proper regulatory regime. That was primarily to protect the consumer, within certain bounds and that is exactly what has successfully been done.

British Gas faced competition from the moment that the 1986 Act was enacted, initially for the supply from others to consumers of more than 25,000 therms a year and thereafter to consumers of more than 2,500 therms. For those who do not appreciate such volumes, that is equal to the annual consumption of about four households. The regulator has successfully imposed a price regime corresponding to the retail prices index minus 4 per cent.

British Gas is not a monopoly. Since the 1986 Act broke up what was at that time a monopoly, about 60 per cent. of gas comes from other suppliers. There are 25 other companies supplying wholesale gas and among them are Alliance, Amerada Hess, Calor, Enron, South Wales Gas, Southern Gas, Sterling Gas and United Gas. All 25 companies are already competing with British Gas at a time when British Gas faces regulation and competition.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. Gentleman speaks about the introduction of competition to the domestic market and about the demand from companies which use gas to generate power. Is he aware that the supply-demand ratio may become insecure? The Bill contains no reference to who will be the supplier of last resort, and that could jeopardise the future.

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Gentleman has a point and it will be addressed in Committee. However, I shall deal with it now by saying that it is already addressed by the geographical pattern of licences. Anyone who applies for a licence for a geographical area will have no way in which to distinguish in supplying gas through the existing pipelines whether he is supplying a house containing a disabled person or in which the main earner has a low income. The distinctions which the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have been trying to draw are entirely contrived and artificial. The guarantees for which he asks will be properly addressed in the detail of the licences in the same way as the licence held by British Gas properly addresses those matters. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that the benefits of privatisation are already massive.

Mr. Clapham: What about VAT?

Mr. Duncan: I shall come to that in a moment. Let us look first at the basic price. The price of gas to the domestic household has gone down by 20 per cent. not just in money terms but in real terms since privatisation in 1986. We have the lowest industrial gas prices in Europe. The network supplying gas used to consist of cast iron pipes, but that has been upgraded. Verges are being dug up for the laying of yellow polyethylene pipes. Between £1.3 billion and £2.2 billion a year is being invested in the pipeline network. That would have been unimaginable under the nationalised system.

Much of the profit in British Gas is invested, much goes to shareholders and much goes to the Inland Revenue. Last year, £504 million was paid in tax and that pays for hospitals and schools and for other projects for which the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) often asks for more money. British Gas has an expanding and significant global presence which would have been unthinkable under the financial constraints of nationalisation.

Despite all those benefits, which are evident even during the transitional phase, it is right to move on. That is what the Bill does. Having gone through the transition of the company being subject to regulation and competition, we should enhance the climate of competition so that the benefits to wholesale consumers can be transferred in equal measure to household consumers. The pessimism of the hon. Member for Dagenham and her hon. Friends is ill placed. Within a few years she will have to eat her words.

Ms Church: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan: I look forward to the hon. Lady doing that now.

Ms Church: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that a greater proportion of his constituents pay by direct debit, that a greater proportion pay their bills promptly, and that fewer are on income support and less able to pay their gas bill than many of my constituents?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I think that three questions are enough.

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Lady advances the typical socialist argument—just because some benefits cannot be spread to all they should be spread to none. It appears that she would deny to those of her constituents who benefit from competition and the direct debit system the benefits that they are already enjoying. The price of her recommendation is that she would confiscate from her constituents and from mine the benefits that they enjoy, just because those same benefits have not yet been extended, as they surely will be, to the rest of her constituents.

Even now, cards are coming through our letter boxes asking domestic consumers to put their names on a register expressing an interest in receiving an alternative

supply of gas for their cookers and heaters. Even now, companies are preparing for the benefits of competition that will derive from the Bill, which I trust will be given a Second Reading tonight.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), in what I thought was an initially ambivalent speech, came down in favour of voting for the Bill. I welcome that because this primary legislation is right. It provides for an equitable regime of duty and obligation on the part of licence holders. There will be a licensing system which will properly supply all parts of this country. The benefits of competition will spread, and—who knows?—some companies might even compete for business by deciding to abolish the standing charge. That is not unthinkable; it is perfectly possible. I look forward to the day when it becomes part of the marketing objectives of the companies that are going to queue up for licences to supply.

There is not just competition within the gas industry; there is competition between gas and other sources of energy. That is the global picture which the hon. Member for Dagenham signally failed to assess.

I should like to pick up a point about what should be in law and what should be in a licence. I can understand some people feeling that all the guarantees and standards that they wish to preserve should be enshrined in the letter of the law—but there is a problem with that. This is a rapidly developing market, taking on new technology, new structures and new competitive methods. If we put all the details in law, we should forever have to come back to the House to amend, update and change the law. It is right to put the parameters in law, and then to leave it to the Secretary of State and the licensing system to ensure that the guarantees which the hon. Lady rightly seeks are given legal effect.

If a company wants to supply gas but does not meet the stipulations in the licence, it is a far more rapid remedy if the Secretary of State removes that licence than if the company goes through the courts for a number of years, supposedly for having failed to observe the terms of the law. So guarantees to the consumer are much better for being in licence form than if we included them in the more cumbersome structure of the Bill.

Another important point concerns the question: why should a supplier of gas feel any less inclined to supply gas to someone who is disabled, just because that someone is disabled? We have heard the cry from the Opposition that the Bill will stop gas going to the disabled. I find that suggestion incomprehensible, and I call on the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to explain what is meant by it—if he cares to repeat the allegation.

I do not accept what has been said about safety either. There are fewer problems with safety, largely as a by-product of more modern equipment for the supply and use of gas. Because the lack of investment hanging over from nationalisation has been so rapidly solved, there are now fewer safety problems and risks associated with the supply of gas.

As for complaints, I heard the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone mention VAT. Certainly, there were problems when it was announced that VAT would be charged on domestic fuel. A lot of people phoned up, not necessarily to complain but to inquire about how to pay their bills. As the measurement system does not distinguish between an inquiry and a complaint, the apparent number of complaints is a fallacious statistic. All that happened was that a great many people—understandably, given that VAT was to go on their bills—phoned up to find out how it was going to work.

Mr. Clapham: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the great British public did not complain about VAT and just accepted that it should be added to fuel bills?

Mr. Duncan: That is not the point that I am making, which is that the total number of complaints which the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and their colleagues measured and then claimed were related to the performance of British Gas have nothing whatever to do with its performance. They were the fall-out from a political decision made in the Budget—nothing to do with safety, customer satisfaction or the performance of British Gas.

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Gentleman will probably be aware of, but has probably not yet read, the research paper produced by the Library which gives a breakdown of complaints and inquiries received by Ofgas. It shows that, in 1993, Ofgas received 1,658 complaints; in 1994 it received 2,203. In the same period, the number of inquiries fell from 184 to 115—so it would appear that the imposition of VAT does not support the hon. Gentleman's argument.

Mr. Duncan: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman is being disingenuous. The figures put to us were not from Ofgas: they were from the Gas Consumers Council, based on a 20,000 sample—*[Interruption.]* I can wave my copy of the research document as easily as the hon. Gentleman can—I have seen the figures in it. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the numbers are very small indeed—250 out of 20 million customers ain't bad. I commend British Gas on its standards.

There has been a great deal of complaint to the effect that those who work for British Gas are dramatically overpaid. I do not agree. Had the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) been present at the meeting of the Employment Select Committee last week, he would have seen the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) squirming at the answers that she got from Cedric Brown, chief executive of British Gas, and from Richard Giordano, chairman of British Gas to her accusation about how the share option scheme worked. It was shown to be completely wrong. The whole point of the share option scheme is that British Gas has to work steadily up the FTSE 100, not just in competition with its own past performance but in competition with all other FTSE 100 companies, before the company so much as earns a penny. Had those executives been paid according to what they have saved consumers since the privatisation of British Gas, they would now be worth billions, not millions.

The consumer is protected by a regulatory regime which has meant prices falling. The shadow Chancellor implies that if the chief executive and his boardroom colleagues gave back their share options, customers would be much better off, but the director general of Ofgas, Clare Spottiswoode, has said:

> "British Gas could pay their directors 10 times the amount they currently are, and the consumer would not pay an additional penny."

She said that on the "Today" programme on 9 March this year.

[Mr. Duncan]

The implication put about by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—that high salaries cost the consumer—is no more than a political point about something which, on the most generous calculation, would be worth 6p a month.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I understood our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to say that if the executives were not paid a bean, it would save gas consumers a penny a week.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend is right. However many fingers we have, we know that only pennies are involved, whether it be one penny, fourpence or sixpence. The amount is small. The policy of criticising boardroom salaries in the pretence that they somehow cost the consumer money is a distasteful exercise in trying to buy votes. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has bought a sixpenny vote on the issue of Cedric Brown's income, yet, if he were ever to get into office, he would slap sixpence on income tax to grab the money off everyone else.

The so-called reasoned amendment picks up on themes that are unfounded. It says that the Bill is

"damaging to the interests of many sections of the population, including elderly people".

It says that the Bill

"fails to provide adequate resources for health and safety"

but that is not so.

The amendment talks about guarantees that will be in the licence, even though they were not in the Bill because circumstances will change. It once again talks about regulatory provision to enable price cuts to consumers where there are unjustified salaries and share options. If the Labour party fails to support the competition that will arise from the Bill, the real benefit of its promise is an enormously generous penny, twopence, threepence and fourpence a week—bully for that. If that is the price of its principles, I can understand why the hon. Gentleman has put such a low price tag on them.

The Bill is the final step to privatisation. It is clear that the Labour party will attack it all the way, but will it reverse it? We do not know. It will not say whether the answer is yes or no. Even on the day that I am speaking, it appears that clause IV will be replaced by clause four and a half and that the rearrangement of the dinosaurs in the Labour party's constitutional museum will merely mean that the promise to nationalise will be replaced by a promise to own industries in public—a mere semantic change, but the same principle remains. It will not even tell us the words of the clause IV replacement.

I predict that it will not be long before the Labour party has to eat its words in the amendment. All that the debate will have revealed is that the Labour party remains an anti-business party. It cares about votes. It does not care about consumers. It will stir up grievance and milk it for all it is worth. It will deploy every method of negative politics that it can. It will deny to its constituents what we will not: the inestimable advantage to consumers, to shareholders and to the economic improvement of the country that will arise from the passage of the Bill.

8.22 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I assure the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) that his speech, in its own way, was every bit as amusing as that which preceded it. When the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) was making her vigorous denunciation of the Bill and all its works, one of his hon. Friends shouted out, "Who wrote this stuff?" I assume that Tim Bell wrote the hon. Gentleman's speech as I have never heard such an extravagant defence of the extravagances of British Gas.

Not all the oil and gas in the North sea would be in Scottish waters if Scotland were independent—just 90 per cent. or so—but I make no territorial demands nor have I any designs on Rutland, so perhaps the hon. Gentleman would abandon his territorial demands on Scottish resources.

I declare an interest as a shareholder in British Gas, albeit a modest one. Perhaps more appropriately, I hold 2,000 shareholders' proxies, so I shall go to the annual general meeting of British Gas on 31 May with the intention of tackling some of the excesses that the hon. Gentleman finds so congenial. I assure him, however, that the vast majority of private shareholders in the company are in open revolt.

I have heard it said that if the Select Committee on Trade and Industry says something, a consensus should exist in the House on the Select Committee's views. I even detected a nod from the Minister when one of his hon. Friends said that. I do not know whether some sort of contract has been offered or whether, from now on, any Select Committee recommendation will be immediately accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It would be an interesting venture if the Government went down that road. However, they are unlikely to do so.

I did not sit on that Select Committee, but I was a member of the Select Committee on Energy which preceded it. I remember that some of us were unenthusiastic, to say the least, about the process of privatisation in the electricity industry. Nevertheless, as privatisation was being proposed we agreed to try to make sensible recommendations in that context. It would have been unfair for people to say that that implied support for privatisation. It is legitimate for a Select Committee to make recommendation within a context set by the Government without conceding the point of principle.

As for the claimed success of British Gas since privatisation, I remind the House that the company has been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission twice since privatisation and to the Office of Fair Trading once. It was in constant battle with the previous regulator, Sir James McKinnon. At last year's general meeting of British Gas, which I also attended as a small shareholder in the company, I remember the valedictory series of insults that were levelled at Sir James by the company's board. One of the small shareholders got up and said that James McKinnon could not be too bad a lad as the person who appointed him was a member of the company board and sitting on the platform. He was referring, of course, to Lord Walker. Given the company's track record of constant battles due to the anti-competitive behaviour that Sir James detected, to claim that the privatised company has been an unqualified success is a remarkable argument.

Mr. Tim Smith: I was surprised to hear what the hon. Gentleman said about the relationship between the

company and the regulator. Surely, by definition there is bound to be a certain degree, to put it mildly, of creative tension. It would be far worse if some kind of cosy relationship existed between the regulator and the company.

Mr. Salmond: These things are a matter of degree. I suggest that two referrals to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and one to the Office of Fair Trading tend to suggest that the Gas Act 1986 had certain flaws. Moreover, the fact that we are debating another Gas Bill to change the ground rules is an implicit admission that the Gas Act 1986 was a failure in terms of introducing proper and effective competition into the gas markets.

I have tried to detect positions of principle in today's debate. With the greatest respect to hon. Members on both sides of the House, however, little of what I have heard today has been about the principle of the Bill. I have a fundamental disagreement in principle. It involves clause 5, which states that TransCo, the transportation company, should continue to be owned by British Gas, although its activities should separated. I object in principle to that arrangement and to clause 5.

I will try to deal with both points of view and to explain to Labour and Conservative Members why they, too, should disagree with that policy in principle. I am attracted to the formulation that the previous Select Committee on Energy advanced for the electricity industry. It took the view that a strong argument existed for the distribution system to remain under public control and under common ownership. It said that that would ensure fair play in the overall market place. If it is no longer fashionable to have common ownership of the means of production and exchange, the Labour party may care to consider whether it might still be possible at least to support common ownership of the means of distribution. Serious ambiguities are left in the system. The company should have a social duty to provide gas supply to areas where it will be extremely costly to provide that supply. That is best catered for within a public sector arrangement.

If the company's safety obligations are placed in the private sector and in a fully competitive environment, that will cause great difficulty. The Labour party might like to consider particularly whether the transportation system would not best be handled within some form of common ownership or public control. I suggest to the Conservatives, too, that the idea that that matter can be left in the hands of British Gas is a fundamental mistake in the privatised structure. One cannot have a truly competitive market in which just one player is left in control—albeit at arm's length—of the distribution system. To illustrate the substantial doubts of other players, I shall quote from an internal memorandum from a private oil company which hopes to move into UK gas supply in a big way. I shall not identify the company as I received the memorandum for other reasons.

On the subject of introducing competition into the gas market, the company refers to the problems that it foresees in its internal planning:

"British Gas TransCo, through its inability to deliver a competent service to shippers and hence our customers, is severely damaging the perception of gas competition among final consumers. Service standards have worsened since last autumn and British Gas TransCo seem to have taken no effective action to improve the situation. We have asked Ofgas to impose financial penalties for failures to meet set standards. However, penalties are not enough in themselves; entering the domestic market with such poor standards of TransCo service would be highly damaging to customers and the reputation of independent suppliers in dealing with the general public."

That is evidence of substantial doubts among companies wanting to move into the freed-up competitive gas market about the effectiveness of TransCo at present and the wisdom of TransCo being part of the overall British Gas network.

British Gas must be one of two things—a company with a larger responsibility as a utility, or just another oil and gas company competing in the market. The ambiguity and personality split are already evident: Mr. Giordano clearly believes that salary levels should be set on the international oil and gas market, while many British Gas customers, staff and shareholders believe that the company has a special and particular obligation as the gas utility of final resort. Until the Government resolve that matter and identify the future for British Gas, the principles in the Bill will remain fundamentally flawed.

As to the internal machinations of British Gas, I am indebted to Mr. Giordano, writing in tonight's *Evening Standard*, for crystallising some of my complaints about the company. Referring to the transformation of British Gas under his chairmanship, Giordano states—ironically, I believe—

"British Gas? Isn't that the company which has all those over-stocked, rather unfriendly showrooms in Britain's high streets?"

The reality is that British Gas has become an unfriendly company with hardly any showrooms because so many have been closed under Mr. Giordano's chairmanship. He also comments on the difficulties that British Gas has encountered with public resentment and shareholder outrage at pay settlements in the company. He writes of Mr. Cedric Brown:

"Alas, the issue of his pay, which has been so unfairly dealt with, has consumed an inordinate amount of energy during the past few months. There has been a fog of confusion and misinformation."

Indeed there has. That fog of confusion and misinformation was created by the board of directors, who refused to reveal to shareholders at the last annual general meeting the pay deals that had been made.

Mr. Duncan: Showrooms are a hoary old chestnut. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that British Gas should be obliged to subsidise retail outlets when one can buy gas appliances from a wide range of retailers and pay one's gas bill free of charge at 19,000 or more post offices?

Mr. Salmond: Scottish Power, a privatised utility, is expanding its showroom network throughout Scotland and moving south of the border. It is surprising that British Gas is retreating from Britain's high streets at precisely the time that other privatised utilities are expanding their showroom network and seem to regard that as a particular advantage in the competitive marketplace.

As to salary levels in British Gas, I will quote from supporting comments for one of the resolutions that I sincerely hope will upset the apple cart at the company's annual general meeting and restore some sanity to its top leadership. The resolution was submitted not by me but by Pensions and Investment Research Consultants, and it details what has happened in terms of the pay deals negotiated behind the scenes. It states:

"Companies have been asked by PIRC and by others to provide full disclosure on the issue of pay. PIRC welcomes British Gas commitment to the principle in future. PIRC notes that the review

[Mr. Salmond]

of the remuneration for executives was not announced at the April 28 1994 AGM, yet the salary rises were backdated to that point and for the chief executive backdated to before the AGM, to January 1994. The Chairman"—

Mr. Giordano—

"was appointed an annual salary (for a two-day week) of £450,000 at the AGM, yet the terms were not disclosed at the AGM or indeed in any of the quarterly statements."

That situation was defended by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton. Details of salary settlements were kept not just from the general public but from shareholders at the AGM. If any Conservative Member, arguing for a competitive market, can defend senior executives who do not have the guts to go before their own shareholders to explain and to defend huge salary increases that the public find offensive, I shall be interested to hear that defence. Events in British Gas have provoked outrage among the public. It is interesting that Conservative Members do not realise that there is a shareholders' army set to march on the AGM to right the wrongs in the company.

The House should examine not just what Mr. Giordano and Mr. Brown have done wrong but the structure that Parliament established in 1986, which allowed a company that the public once held in high esteem to become widely despised by the public and wholly hated by its shareholders.

I explained earlier how moving to an open market can provoke problems as well as create opportunities. I gave the example of the people of Rosehearty and Sandhaven in my constituency. In Banff and Buchan terms, they are substantial villages of several hundred people. They live within a few miles of St. Fergus gas terminal, which is one of the largest in Europe. The flames from St. Fergus light up the evening sky. Those villages have wanted a gas supply for many years. One might criticise the structure of the nationalised British Gas which rationed gas supplies to consumers throughout the country, but my villagers' hopes were raised when they received a commitment from British Gas after privatisation that supply would be extended to their villages.

At that time, British Gas in Scotland had the ability to operate a formula whereby the cost of connecting rural communities could be approached imaginatively. It assumed a number of connections over the years, which allowed the high initial cost to be offset on the assumption that more customers would be attracted in the longer term. By that means, villagers in St. Fergus, St. Combs, Inverallochy and Cairnbulg were connected to a gas supply at a cost of £40 per household in the early 1990s. Villagers in Sandhaven and Rosehearty are now being offered connection at more than £1,000.

The explanation is that changes in British Gas have totally eliminated management autonomy in Scotland, so the previous formula has been vetoed by the London headquarters. Also—this is interesting in the context of competition—British Gas argues that it cannot afford the substantial outlay of connecting small villages if it cannot be protected from another company supplying those households in the future after British Gas has met the high initial cost. The move to competition is not helping people to obtain a gas supply but actively hindering the extension of the network. A once reasonable connection charge has become highly inflated. The House must deal with that real situation, which is confronting rural households the length and breadth of the country.

There are objections in principle to the Bill. The question of competition has not been fully thought through and cannot be dealt with while TransCo remains in the hands of British Gas. I see no reason why the Opposition should not vote against the Bill in principle, because it does not offer that protection, as well as making some factual points through the reasoned amendment. For that reason, if no one else divides the House on Second Reading, my party and Plaid Cymru will certainly do so.

8.39 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is very concerned about clause 5. I understand that, but I do not see it as a reason for him to vote against the Bill, which has considerable merit. In 1982-83, I served on the Standing Committee which considered the Telecommunications Bill, which led to the privatisation of British Telecom. Apart from a speech made by Mr. John Golding, who was sponsored by the Post Office Engineering Union, which now appears in the "Guinness Book of Records", I remember that Labour Members indulged in various scare stories about what would happen when British Telecom was privatised. They said that prices would rise, that the service would deteriorate and that the number of call boxes would be decimated. The exact opposite happened. In real terms, prices dropped dramatically. The service improved tremendously because BT started to employ salesmen rather than order takers and a telephone line could be connected within 24 hours. The number of call boxes that work is now much higher than it was when the business was nationalised.

We have seen the same pattern with every privatisation measure brought before the House since 1982. We saw the same pattern with the Gas Bill in 1986. The same claims were made about what would happen when British Gas was privatised as a monopoly. Labour Members said—this is on the record—that prices would rise and that the service would deteriorate. In fact, as we have heard during the debate, the price of gas in real terms has fallen by 20 per cent. since the business was privatised. Every consumer of gas has benefited. Shareholders, including the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, have also benefited because profits and dividends have risen. As I said in an intervention, it is possible in such circumstances that customers and shareholders can benefit.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan suggested that the fact that we introduced the Bill meant that we had got the legislation wrong in 1986. He seemed to think that once one had legislated on something, it was never possible to amend the legislation in any way, or alternatively, that if one did amend it, it was an admission of guilt or fault. Clearly, we have moved on from 1986. An element of competition was built into the Gas Act 1986 so that, as we have heard during the debate, industrial customers have benefited significantly. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) told the House that there are now 25 independent gas companies supplying industrial consumers and that the price to those consumers has fallen dramatically. I suggest

that it is sensible to move on from there to see whether it is possible to bring an element of competition into the supply of gas to domestic consumers.

People sometimes suggest that the Government have run out of radical ideas. I suggest that the Bill is an extremely radical measure. There is no major capitalist country in which there is genuine competition in the supply of gas to domestic consumers. The idea that one can retain the pipes in one company and then generate competition by supplying gas from different suppliers down those pipes is relatively recent. The Bill represents a substantial step forward.

It is not surprising that it is difficult to envisage precisely how the new system will work. That is why it is right that legislation should be relatively flexible and not too prescriptive. It is right that many of the terms and conditions under which the competitors of British Gas will operate should apply under licences granted by the Director General of Gas Supply because it will be easier for her to alter the terms than it will be for the House to amend primary legislation.

Over the past few weeks, there has been a lot of debate about the role of the regulators. It is true that the regulators have considerable power; it is right that they should have considerable independence. The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), or the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church)—I cannot recall which—suggested that there was not sufficient accountability. Accountability does not mean that Select Committees should give directions to the regulator. It is right that the regulators should be accountable. It is reasonable that they are confined to a clear and relatively narrow objective, which is to ensure that the system operates in the interests of consumers.

What concerns me about the way in which the Labour party is moving is that it wants to try to go back to the bad old days of the nationalised industries. The difficulty was that although the 1948 White Paper said that the nationalised industries would operate at arm's length and that Ministers would not interfere in their day-to-day affairs, the history of what happened over the next 30 years showed that no Minister of any political party could resist the temptation to interfere in their affairs.

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Gentleman is being rather narrow in his interpretation of the Bill's remit as regards the regulator. The Bill says that the regulator shall have a duty

"to secure that, so far as it is economical to meet them, all reasonable demands in Great Britain . . . are met".

The Bill says that the regulator shall have a duty

"to secure that licence holders are able to finance the carrying on of the activities which they are authorised . . . to carry on"

and a duty

"to secure effective competition".

There are three major and substantial responsibilities for the regulator which are embodied in clause 1. It seems likely that the hon. Gentleman has not read the Bill if he did not get as far as clause 1.

Mr. Smith: I understand that point. However, all those objectives are included in the Bill because they are clearly in the interests of the consumer. That is exactly as it should be.

The difficulty when these businesses were publicly owned, nationalised industries was that Ministers interfered in their day-to-day management for a raft of different reasons. I remember when their prices were held down artificially to meet an objective of the income or prices policy of the Government of the day. That meant that those industries made losses and that the taxpayer had to subsidise them. No Governments were able to resist the temptation—

Mr. O'Neill: That was done by the Heath Government.

Mr. Smith: The Heath Government. I said that no Governments of whatever complexion were able to resist the temptation to interfere in the day-to-day affairs of those industries.

It is not possible to establish a regime under which those companies remain in the public sector, but under which the Government set up a regulator who regulates their affairs. That is not an option. The only solution is to move those businesses into the private sector and then to establish a degree of independent regulation. The far better option is, as far as possible, to introduce competition into the affairs of a particular industry. That is what the Bill would do and for that reason, I very much welcome it.

I do not believe that the powers of the regulator should go further than those set out in the Bill. What concerns me about what Labour Front-Bench Members are now saying about the system of regulation is that we would return effectively to the bad old days. They would give new powers to the regulators. They would give to the regulators, for example, the power to start interfering in the day-to-day affairs of the business. We already know that Labour plans to give the regulator power to fix the level of remuneration of board members. That is just for starters. I suspect that Labour will be unable to resist the temptation to suggest that the regulator should also be concerned about employment levels in the business. That was always a major consideration when these businesses were nationalised industries; they were effectively employment creation agencies. In other words, employment was held at artificially high levels to ensure that unemployment did not rise. I do not believe that that was a legitimate use of nationalised industries, yet that is precisely what happened.

Mr. Salmond: I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman's argument is leading. Is he saying that the previous ideological battle between members of the two Front Benches about the ownership of any industry will be replaced by a debate about the extent of the powers of the regulator? If that is the sum total of the debate, I suggest that they all sit on the same Bench.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman underestimates the importance of the issue which I am discussing. I am not suggesting that it is trivial, as he apparently believes. The power of the regulator is absolutely fundamental. It is terribly tempting to give the regulator this power or that power because we do not like this abuse or that abuse. None of us has liked what has been going on in the privatised utilities. Nobody looks on it with favour, but the answer to the problem is not to add to the powers of the regulator.

There is no doubt that when these businesses were nationalised industries, employment was a very important factor. That is why even the Treasury underestimated the ability of businesses to reduce their costs and the speed at which they could do it once they were privatised. That is certainly what happened with the regional electricity

[Mr. Smith]

companies. They drove their costs down far more quickly than anybody anticipated. They did that, of course, by increasing productivity and reducing staffing levels. That has happened throughout the industries which have been transferred to the private sector. They are far more efficient and more cost-effective than they were.

It would not be sensible to revert to the kind of system that we had before and that is why the Labour party's policies worry me. The proposals in the Bill are the best way forward. They will introduce a substantial element of competition in the supply of gas to the domestic customer and that is extremely welcome.

8.51 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I challenge the whole philosophy behind the Bill because the proposition that competition can be left to its own devices and, thereby, automatically establish ideal equilibrium in the gas market is entirely without foundation. We are not dealing with a traditional, conventional area of supply and demand that can be rationed by price. We are not dealing with high-speed consumer gadgetry for which competition is ideal. We are dealing with a key, strategic and essential service. The Bill, in line with the Government's whole policy and their free market mania, is at the expense of public interests and in favour of private interests.

The Bill will have three immediate consequences. It will increase cherry picking as the competition focuses and concentrates on the areas where most money can be made at the expense of the rest, which will result in social dumping. Secondly, it will undermine the strategic interests of the British economy by forcing our only national champion—British Gas—to concentrate on pygmy competition in its own back yard, instead of international competition that can advance the strategic interests of the British economy. The third major defect of the Bill is that it will operate under an inadequate system of regulation, which is not accountable to Parliament and is not seriously democratically accountable. The gas regulator and other regulators are virtually tin gods; a law unto themselves. They are pursuing competition blindly.

One of the immediate consequences of such an approach is the lack of a sensible energy policy. In fact, we do not have one at all because each regulator and each competitive market is pursuing its narrow interests in a compartmentalised fashion and they cannot be aggregated to pursue an energy policy in the public interest.

As a result of that free market mania, we are seeing the compartmentalisation of gas into shipping, transportation and supply, which means that the benefits of an integrated service, such as for repairs, are prevented. If one has a problem with one's gas system, wherever it may be situated, somebody from British Gas turns up at one's front door in a van. That van contains all sorts of things. It could contain a thermo-couple for a boiler, a small item for a cooker, something to do with the meter or some other part of the system that has gone wrong. With that one service man or woman and the equipment stored in the van, it is possible to rectify that problem. In future, if there is an emergency of some kind, TransCo will send out an operative to deal with the problem and effect a repair. He or she will effect that repair if there is a problem with the meter. Beyond that—

Mr. Nigel Evans *rose*—

Mr. Hain: I am sorry that I cannot take interventions, much as I would like to, but many hon. Members want to speak.

Beyond problems with the meter, other people will have to be called in. The list of various operatives in the Council for the Registration of Gas Installers will have to called on and those people will be invited to—perhaps—repair a cooker. That will result in an extra call-out charge being imposed on the householder, whereas at the moment there is simply one call-out charge and one person deals with the whole job.

The ethos of an integrated service is being destroyed in front of our eyes. That may be of no interest to Conservative Members, but it certainly interests Labour Members, who have the interests of the people at heart, as opposed to those who wish to make profits out of the system. For example, as a matter of courtesy and good will, the gas man or woman may take a cooker out and replace it with a more modern model, and rather than throw the old cooker on the scrap heap, may install it free of charge in the home of—perhaps—an old woman whose cooker has broken down. That may not be competitive or go along with cost-related charging and all the jargon of the free market, but it reflects an integrated service.

Indeed, it has even been the practice among British Gas workers to look at old, abandoned cookers, strip them down, put some of the parts in their vans and supply them to pensioners when they are in need of such equipment. Again, that service may be provided free of charge and may not conform to the dictates of the market, but it supplies a public service for people in need.

Cross-subsidy will be impossible under the cost-related system of charging, which will be one of the guiding principles of the Bill when it becomes law. A uniform price, which has been one of the cardinal principles of the supply of gas in this country over many generations, will be impossible. We shall no longer have a uniform price. Safety will also be impaired and threatened by this regime. All those are consequences of the compartmentalisation of the industry; the destruction of an integrated service.

I now refer to cherry picking and social dumping. Inevitably, the focus of competition will be in areas where the money can be made. Hon. Members need not accept that proposition from a left-wing Labour Member; they can accept it from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which predicted that social dumping and cherry picking would take place when such a regime, or something like it, was advocated.

The competitors will not be interested in going up a remote Welsh mountainside to supply gas. They will not be interested in supplying gas at the top of a south Wales valley such as the Dulais valley in my constituency. Gas is supplied only half way up that valley. The competitors will be interested only in making money and in competing where the money can be made—among large users and rich households. Inevitably, there will be differential pricing. Indeed, the Government have conceded that. Rich customers and large users will pay relatively less; poor customers and low users will pay relatively more. That is a form of social dumping and it is already happening.

A dress rehearsal for that regime is already occurring in respect of the change introduced by British Gas whereby direct debit customers pay 5 per cent. less. That is a form of social dumping and it particularly hurts people on low incomes who cannot afford to have direct debits. I very much resent the arrogance of many Conservative Members who seem oblivious to the fact that many pensioners in my constituency, and I am sure in constituencies across the country, are frightened about direct debits. They are terrified at the prospect of a bank raiding their accounts, month by month, whether or not they have the money to pay those debits. Why should those people pay 5 per cent. more on their gas bills when they cannot afford those bills anyway? That is a form of direct social dumping.

Other consequences of the Bill worry me a great deal. The obligation to supply is defined in statutory form in section 10(1) of the Gas Act 1986. However, that obligation has been weakened. It has been removed from the new Bill. TransCo simply has an obligation to connect a premises to the network. It no longer has an obligation to supply. It has been said—and I have no doubt about this—that the obligation to supply is in the licence. However, that weakens the obligation. The obligation should be in the legislation where it can be democratically accountable. It should not be in a licence or left to the regulator to police.

Similarly, the obligation to publish prices has been weakened. That provision was contained in section 14(1) of the Gas Act 1986. The Bill deletes that requirement. Why does it do that? That obligation is weakened and it is transferred into the licence. I do not believe that that is an adequate safeguard.

The obligation not to show undue preference or discrimination when setting prices has been weakened. That obligation was also contained in section 14 of the 1986 Act and it is another derogation to the licence and to the regulator. That undermines democratic accountability. Those are warning signals that social dumping will be institutionalised as part of the new competitive regime.

Wales, in particular, will lose out. As it is far away from the points where gas is beached on the east coast, according to British Gas, charges could rise by up to 8 per cent. above those on the east coast. In addition, because Wales has many more low-income households than in the rest of the United Kingdom, social dumping will hit the people of Wales much harder.

Proportionately, half the number of people in Wales are on direct debit in comparison with elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Many more cannot be on direct debit because Wales is the lowest income area of Britain. As a result of the 5 per cent. extra through not benefiting from direct debit; the 8 per cent. extra to pay for gas to be transported from the east coast; and differential pricing, which could be as high as 12 per cent., and which will open up between low users and rich users, people in Wales could pay 25 per cent. more than people elsewhere in Britain. Why should the people of Wales suffer simply because of their geography?

I want to finish—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for the encouragement from the Opposition Front Bench. My major strategic criticism of the Bill is that it does not create a level playing field for competition. There is no reciprocity. British Gas has to compete with many foreign-owned suppliers and companies, when it cannot compete in Europe, where there is no reciprocal opportunity to enter European markets. It is having to compete with European companies such as Shell, Elf, Total, Statoil and Norsk Hydro, which have access to our markets while there is no reciprocity for us to have access to their markets.

British Gas is planning to invest up to £2 billion internationally over the next five or six years. It is in a very important market as one of the big international global players. If it is forced continually to fight off competition in its own back yard, it will be prevented from being a big player, and Britain will lose out strategically and economically to companies in Europe, America and elsewhere, which are coming in on much more favourable terms. For all those reasons, I believe that the Bill is the last spasm of a failed Thatcherism and I am totally opposed to it.

9.3 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I have enjoyed many of the speeches this evening, but I did not enjoy the speech by the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain). The hon. Gentleman—a former leader of the Young Liberals—has changed his politics once by moving leftwards, and no doubt he can change them again. I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church), but not as much as she appeared to enjoy it herself. The hon. Lady was extremely witty, but if she cannot take her speech seriously, I do not see how she can expect the rest of the House to do so.

The message that we are getting loud and clear from the Labour party is that it is in favour of competition, but not the Government's sort of competition. As the Labour party experiences the death of clause IV and grieves over the sad departure of a loved one, it is finding that the vacuum created is rather difficult to fill. The Labour party cannot quite embrace privatisation and full competition because it has been weaned on state control, which is ingrained in its soul.

There is no doubt that if Labour forms the next Government, there will be far more state control than there is at present. The golden share will be held on behalf of the Government and in the interests of the unions, and certainly not in the interests of the consumers. We are seeing the sequel to clause IV, but—as with many sequels—it does not stand up to what went before. The Labour party's message is that it has principles, but if one does not like them, it has other principles.

The only thing worse than a monopoly is a state monopoly. The Government want to introduce competition because it is good for the consumer. The scheme has started with 500,000 consumers and will be extended to 2 million before all 18 million consumers benefit from the extension of competition in the delivery of gas to all consumers. Competition benefits many people in industry, and gas is currently being supplied to 60 per cent. of businesses by companies other than British Gas.

As I said during an intervention on the hon. Member for Dagenham, we have heard the Labour party's fears on privatisation and competition before, and British Telecom was the prime example. BT now has competitors such as Mercury and many other cable operators. In my area in the north-west, Nynex is investing more than £1.8 billion to provide cable entertainment and telephony in direct competition with British Telecom.

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

Since privatisation, BT has invested some £22 billion in the telecommunications market, and that has come in the face of competition with cable operators, which are now putting 50,000 people a month on to their systems. That is the sort of competition we want. Thanks to that competition in the telecommunications market, prices have fallen and far more people are benefiting from that. The hon. Member for Dagenham talked about constituents who could not afford to get on to the telephone system.

Ms Church: Do not laugh.

Mr. Evans: I am not laughing. There have always been people who have not been on the telephone system for one reason or another, but—thanks to privatisation and competition within the telephone market—there are far more public telephone boxes that those people can use than was ever the case before, and far more of those telephones are working than ever before.

We have also heard the argument that many people who are low users of telephones might find that their charges will go up. However, quite the opposite has occurred and low users are now getting rebates. That is not a result of Government legislation, but because it is in the interests of BT to do that.

With regard to the payment of gas bills, I live in a rural area and there are many post offices in villages there. I am delighted that people will now have the opportunity to go to those post offices to pay their gas bills at no charge to them. That will be a shot in the arm for post offices across the country, including those in the constituency of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

There has been tremendous downward pressure on prices within British Gas. Analysts have predicted that there will be a further fall of about 10 per cent. in addition to the 20 per cent. that we have already seen. Prices to industrial users have fallen by between 10 and 15 per cent. since competition was introduced. So I look forward to further falls in gas prices for my consumers.

We have heard the old chestnut about a 5 per cent. discount being given to people who can afford to pay by direct debit. Opposition Members say how terrible that is because it is done at the expense of everyone else. Yet British Gas plans to introduce discounts for people who pay promptly in cash or by cheque. That has to be welcomed. Some people try to delay paying their gas bill, electricity bill or any other bill until the last possible moment. I believe that people who take the time and trouble to pay promptly ought to be given every incentive to do so and should benefit from doing so. I see nothing wrong with that whatever.

We have heard a catalogue of scare stories from Opposition Members on various things including safety standards and essential safeguards. Yet those matters are covered in the Bill. We have heard again about cherry picking, but we know that the licence conditions will be sufficient to ensure that cherry picking does not take place. As someone who represents a rural area, I welcome that. I want to ensure that everyone benefits from competition. We shall see that in the pilot in the south-west.

We have also heard that the disabled and the blind will lose out under the Bill, even though they have been told that that will not be the case. It was suggested that there should be one number—perhaps 888—for people who have gas leaks or fears about electricity. It would be a good idea if they could dial one number from a telephone. I hope that that will be examined more carefully.

The Labour party talked about cherry picking this evening. The cherry picking in which Labour Members have been involved is picking on Cedric Brown, share options and directors' pay. It is the worst case of the politics of envy that I have seen in a long time. Irrespective of the conclusions of the Greenbury committee, if a Labour Government were elected, they would no doubt act on share options and directors' pay. That can be seen clearly as a diversion from the other cherry picking that they would do. Not only the people at the top of the premier league, but people in division one, division two, division three and all the lower divisions would suffer. A Labour Government would pick on anyone and everyone because they would try to implement a massive programme and would need extra money to pay for it.

We need profits in our companies in Britain because we need the investment that will be made with those profits. If the Labour party sees itself forming a future Labour Government and hitting companies that make profits, it must also accept that it will hit essential investments necessary for those companies to grow, flourish, go into the world market and compete.

The Bill will benefit British companies. It will certainly benefit gas suppliers that wish to compete with British Gas. I fundamentally believe that it will benefit the consumers. We are here this evening to protect the consumers and promote their interests. I believe that the Bill will do exactly that.

9.13 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I have been surprised by the debate. I was disappointed by Conservative Members, who spent more time in a debate on the Gas Bill speaking about telephones and what had happened in the telecommunications industry than they did on comparing what had happened in the gas industry before privatisation and since. Much of the success of British Gas since privatisation has been built on the skills that people learnt while the industry was still nationalised. The emphasis that the nationalised British Gas placed on training and skills for the work force has benefited the company a great deal.

My main disappointment with the debate is that no reference has been made by Conservative Members and very little, I am afraid, by Opposition Members to the environmental consequences of the Bill. The Order Paper tags up the fact that the reports on energy conservation by the Select Committee on the Environment are relevant to this debate, and I had hoped that the Minister might mention that subject in his reply, but the leaked version that was circulating earlier did not seem to contain much concern for energy conservation.

The Environment Select Committee, of which I was then a member, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), carried out a very useful survey and report for the House. We followed it up with further inquiries into energy conservation. It is essential that the Government meet their Rio commitments, but, for all our constituents, it also makes good sense to save energy in the home, in industry and in offices.

The idea that the only thing that matters at the moment is the price of gas is a major failure. The issue has to be considered in a much wider context. It is much more important for the country and for many people that we consider the price of gas over a period of time. The dash for gas by the electricity generators has not been in the country's long-term interests. It may mean that electricity prices have come down, but it has done a great deal of damage to the coal industry and to people who make mining engineering equipment.

If one brings the price down further and further, one certainly makes it harder to encourage alternative forms of energy production—certainly the renewable forms that might be far better for the long-term interests of the country. It also affects exploration.

We should not forget the fundamental fact that natural gas is a finite resource. If we use it irresponsibly now, future generations will not be able to use it. I know all the arguments. For the past 20 years, it has been said that the supply will eventually run out, but as fast as people have been saying that, new discoveries have been made. Because it is a finite resource, it will run out in the end. The hope is that, by the time that it starts to run out, alternatives will have been found, but as there is no total logic that says that the two will coincide, it would merely be prudent for us to try to reduce the amount of energy that we waste. It would certainly be good for the environment if we were to do so.

I remind the House that one of the most severe jolts to British industry occurred with the sudden hike in oil prices in the early 1970s. Although I cannot imagine circumstances in which there would be a sudden hike of the same dimensions in the price of natural gas, it is irresponsible to go on consuming natural gas so wastefully. It is important that we deal with the problem and, sadly, the Bill is not an attempt to do that.

Rio required a major reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. Originally, the Government estimated that the Energy Saving Trust should reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 2.5 million tonnes. Last week, the Secretary of State for the Environment revised that figure downwards on the basis that, because of the way in which energy is being generated, it is not necessary to make quite such a big saving. He is still looking for a reduction in the region of 1.3 million tonnes by the year 2000, however, and if that is to be achieved, there must be some money for energy conservation. So far, the Government have not come up with a mechanism for paying for that. Originally, it was hoped that some of the money would come from the gas industry, but the new regulator stepped in and virtually vetoed that.

The Government are now committed to competition. Whereas electricity consumers will pay about £6 a year towards energy conservation measures, gas consumers will pay virtually nothing. The Government should certainly have taken the opportunity provided by the Bill to propose some mechanism for making the Energy Saving Trust work.

If the regulator must simply obey the law and the law is tightly defined, that is a useful role for a regulator but not very important. The Government say that they want to give the regulator a political role and it is clear that, over the past few years, the regulator has made political decisions. I simply argue that, if it is a political role, it should be exercised by a Minister accountable to this House, not by someone at second hand from the House.

Earlier in the debate, the President of the Board of Trade said that if we dealt with the benefits that were going to the top executives in British Gas, gas bills would be reduced by only 50p per consumer. If many of my constituents could have the 50p per consumer being squandered by those at the top of the gas industry—the same applies to the other privatised industries—it would make a considerable difference to their expenditure.

Finally, I regret that the Bill makes no reference to the gas industry's environmental responsibilities. The only reference that it makes is to pipes. I gather that that puts the industry on the same footing as the electricity industry, which is responsible for pylons. The gas industry should have a far wider environmental responsibility and should certainly be responsible for conserving supplies of natural gas, which will ultimately run out.

9.20 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): The reasoned amendment in my name and that of my right hon. Friends is based on the assumption that we oppose a private monopoly. We are willing to have competition because the record of British Gas is not sound enough to merit our continued support.

When this issue came before the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for consideration some time ago, we argued that British Gas should be allowed to operate in its present form because it was a world-class company, and that it was entitled to have in the United Kingdom a base of a size that enabled it to work extensively abroad. We still hold that view and, therefore, do not oppose clause 5, which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) used as an excuse for opposing the Bill in principle. British Gas is a natural monopoly, but it is currently subject to close regulatory processes, Chinese walls and the threat of being split up if it does not operate as a single body.

Mr. Salmond: I do not necessarily expect the hon. Gentleman to share my principles. He seems to have none of his own and seems to be about to recommend to his hon. Friends that they first vote to decline to give the Bill a Second Reading and then abstain on a subsequent vote when the question of Second Reading is put to the test.

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Gentleman clearly does not take too much time paying attention to the procedures of the House, as he spends most of his time outside the Chamber. The whole point of tabling a reasoned amendment is that we do not oppose the principle of the Bill. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand that fundamental procedural point, he has some learning still to do. We believe that British Gas's role in the domestic market should be opened up to a degree of competition.

I have already referred to the MMC's 1993 report, in which it said:

> "We recognise that, while introduction of competition may well result in a reduction in the overall level of prices, some groups may be worse off".

Our amendment seeks to minimise that deleterious effect.

Several groups are vulnerable. This has been an effective and wide-ranging debate. While we may not have agreed with everything said by Conservative Members, a number of their speeches were uncharacteristically thoughtful. On cherry picking and social dumping, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath

[Mr. O'Neill]

(Mr. Hain) said that, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed out in its report of January last year, the average weekly wage in Wales is some £223, whereas in the south of England it is some £290. Even if we have uniform pricing, some areas will experience considerable disadvantage. We shall have to wait to see whether competition can bring down prices in areas such as south Wales to make the new entrants into the business that much more attractive to existing consumers. That is hard to envisage because of distances and consumption.

Some of the evidence given by representatives of British Gas to the MMC has been undermined by the introduction of the direct debit discount. British Gas was able to introduce its own form of cherry-picking in advance of competition taking place. That was a crass public relations error.

The discount was a gross insult to the poorer consumers, many of whom do not have bank accounts. Many of them do not have direct debit facilities. Over the past few months a sizeable television campaign has been waged by the banks and others in support of the direct debit system because many people are still sufficiently unsure of their relationships with banks not to enter into direct debit agreements. British Gas's opportunism undermines its claims about cherry-picking.

Mr. Duncan: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that if a company such as British Gas improves the credit performance of its customers and attracts as many people who can give security of payment as possible, the ensuing benefits will bear on all consumers through the greater efficiency that will have been achieved?

Mr. O'Neill: British Gas could similarly have benefited small consumers who pay regularly and on time. In fact, British Gas has been able to pull a stroke that may be difficult for its competitors to follow in securing access to 19,000 post offices. It remains to be seen whether there will be that number of post offices when the Bill is enacted and begins to be implemented. We shall worry about that when the time comes. If British Gas had really wanted to be of assistance, it would have introduced the discount at the earliest opportunity. That would have prevented yet another PR boob.

Our concerns are not limited to payment. The starting point must be safety. Of all energy sources, gas is potentially the most dangerous. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) talked about the work that is done at Killingworth and throughout the country by trained BG staff. Many of those who are now responsible for installation, maintenance and safety work are Corgi employees. They are not employed by British Gas. Under the Corgi scheme, contractors are registered. There is no requirement on the contractors to secure properly qualified staff.

Many gas fitters who are unemployed as a result of redundancies are available to be recruited. It is to be hoped that the men will get jobs elsewhere. It must be understood, however, that many of the installation and maintenance contracts for gas consumers are being undertaken by Corgi contractors who do not adhere to proper safety standards. They are not capable of doing so because they do not have properly trained staff in the relevant disciplines.

As far as we are concerned, that is an anxiety, but we recognise that the Government have taken it into account in their requirement that the Health and Safety Executive makes proper provision for it. The only problem is that the Government have not provided the HSE with the resources to do so. Members of the HSE—the Trades Union Congress and the GMB—who are the people responsible for picking up the pieces when something goes wrong with the safety arrangements for British Gas, have expressed great disquiet about the funding and resourcing of the work for which the HSE will now be responsible, and I would hope—

Mr. Duncan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: No, I am sorry. The hon. Gentleman took up a considerable amount of the House's time—longer than I shall be able to speak this evening.

Perhaps when he replies, the Minister will be able to tell us about the financial provisions that the Government will make available to the HSE to carry out its work, because one of the areas about which there is considerable disquiet is in the Bill's consideration of financial matters generally. It is not enough to say that provisions should be made to take out a financial bond or make other arrangements to the director general's satisfaction to cover the financial costs of suppliers—basically, having to cover the cost when a supplier goes bust. It is our view that leaving it to the discretion of the director general is not ideal, and we shall table amendments to secure that companies that wish to enter are required to take out bonds.

We know that there is a certain shyness, or diffidence, on the part of the director general to require people to put down money. She does not like the idea of handling other people's money, as we found in the debate on the E-factor levy, but we believe that the provision of a commodity as substantial and potentially dangerous as gas should be undertaken only by people with the appropriate financial resources, sufficient concern for safety and a degree of security in their financial activities, which will enable some form of guarantee to be part and parcel of the package. Something along the lines of the air tour operator's licence, which is required by people involved in the travel business, would be of assistance.

We want greater protection for the consumer. It was widely predicted that the director general wanted to remove the Gas Consumers Council. I am pleased that she was not successful. We believe that the role of the GCC as a separate body, apart from both the Government and the regulator, is important. We want it to continue in its present role. We want the statutory responsibility for consumer protection, which is contained in the Gas Act 1986, continued in the proposed legislation. We do not think that discretionary licence control is the best way of doing that, because at the moment, as I understand from the memorandum that has been made available by the Minister—we are grateful for it at this stage and look forward to receiving the licences at his earliest convenience—the discretionary provisions that are left in the hands of the director general are insufficient. The GCC has echoed that and says that the provisions that are made in the 1986 Act, as amended by the Competition and Service (Utilities) Act 1992, provide an obligation to supply, to publish prices, and not to show undue preference or discrimination between customers. Those principles should be enshrined in the proposed legislation.

Reference has been repeatedly made this evening to the standard of service, particularly to the old and disabled, and few people will forget the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Ms Church), who went out and saw the work of the properly qualified home service advisers. We can joke about the passion with which she made her point, but it was a vital point. She said that elderly people who were infirm and dependent on specialist advice and equipment were entitled to receive those services in perpetuity.

As has been pointed out, British Gas—which some defend, describing it as the only provider of good services—has already sacked some 61 home service advisers this year. They were graduates with proper technical qualifications, capable of arguing their case with their superiors. Such services for the old and disabled must be central.

Some organisations, including the Consumers Association, have expressed a degree of cynicism about United Gas's claim that the standard of service would be enhanced—"the thirty-nine steps", as United Gas described the process. It is suspected that United Gas said that in the certain knowledge that the consumers who would supposedly benefit from such protection would be discouraged from doing business with it, thus imposing an additional burden on British Gas. I do not know whether that will happen, but we shall examine the issue carefully in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who is a member of the Select Committee on the Environment, mentioned the absence of proper attention to the environment in the Bill. We want more than a token gesture in regard to pipelines; we want to consider the whole question of energy efficiency. It seems that what was crystal clear in the days of James McKinnon has become a grey area; certainly it is well known, and has been recorded in the minutes of several Select Committees, that Mrs. Spottiswoode is not enthusiastic about the E-factor. She does not want a levy to provide for effective energy-efficiency advice.

Mrs. Spottiswoode has seen fit to approve only a handful of schemes suggested by the Energy Saving Trust, the body through which such advice would be channelled. However, Lord Moore—a former Secretary of State for Energy, now chair of the Energy Saving Trust—has said that the aims of the Rio summit should be incorporated in legislation, and that there should be a statutory requirement to provide for energy efficiency. We shall return to that in Committee.

Investment in energy efficiency, however, is of secondary importance to investment in research and development. British Gas has invested in R and D for many years. One reason for our claim that we want British Gas to be a major player not only in the United Kingdom but throughout the world is that it would sustain its investment in the UK as well as abroad.

Representations by British Gas to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry suggested that the company should not be subject to special restrictions on commercial freedom to restructure if that would not be in the interests of the shareholders. We believe that such restrictions should apply if they will require British Gas to invest in the most modern and efficient methods of gas provision—if for no other reason, because, as no one has disputed, British Gas will remain the major gas supplier for some time. As for the other suppliers, there are the regional electricity companies, whose records leave something to be desired in some areas. Seven are linked to Utilicorp alone, and another group is linked to other major oil and gas companies. We should certainly like greater attention to be paid to the activities of those companies. There should be greater provision for the regulator or the legislation should enshrine provisions to ensure that the executive salaries of directors are given proper attention.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: I do not have time to give way. The hon. Gentleman has not been here for much of the debate.

Last week Mr. Giordano told the Select Committee on Employment that he was happy to have full transparency either through a change in stock exchange rules or by the introduction of a new law. This is an opportunity for the House to introduce such legislation. Mr. Giordano is not against it, we want it, and we cannot understand why Conservative Members should turn their backs on it. If it is good enough for the chairman of British Gas it should be good enough for the Government. Such payments are certainly distasteful to the Prime Minister, but we are not sure about the attitude of the President of the Board of Trade.

Before long pilot areas will be in operation. We are concerned that the trials will not just be about operational and technical efficiency but will be used to monitor the practices and policies and the advertising techniques of the companies that want to challenge British Gas. As the Select Committee said, during the transitional period we should be able to look at all aspects of the legislation. We welcome that period and hope that before long we shall be able to review what has taken place.

The Bill marks a change in the British consumers' opportunity to buy gas. British Gas should not have a monopoly because that is not necessary. However, if that monopoly is broken due protection should be provided and it should be enshrined in the legislation and not in the licences. Protection should clearly be provided for the elderly and the infirm, it should relate to the duty to supply and it should require all the companies to publish their tariffs so as to make clear what is happening.

We appreciate that the legislation could place a tremendous burden on the regulatory process, which has much to answer for. In the past 10 days we have seen its inadequacy when applied to electricity, and in the past few months there have been inconsistencies in application between one regulator and another in the same area. The Bill should correct many of the shortcomings. There will be opportunities to debate these matters in Committee, where our amendment will provide an opportunity to improve legislation that leaves a lot to be desired. We are not prepared to support it in its present form and shall look to see what we can achieve in Committee and on Third Reading.

9.42 pm

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): This has been an interesting debate on what is essentially a technical Bill. Hon. Members who have been here for the debate will realise that it had a detail which is normally associated with Committee discussions. Many of the issues that have been raised can be debated in Committee.

[Mr. Tim Eggar]

I listened to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) with considerable interest because on 27 February I received a letter from Clydebank district council. It was in response to my letter asking local authorities whether they wanted their districts to be included in the pilot areas for competition. Clydebank council said:

"(a) Clydebank should be included in the first or at worst second batch of premises relating to the extension of competition."

In other words, Clydebank wanted the benefits of competition that flow from this Bill—a clear and, one would have thought, unequivocal contribution. But it goes on:

"(b) Your Department be reminded of the policy of this district council in being against the privatisation of the gas industry."

In other words, the council wanted the benefits of competition but not the implications of that competition—

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Is it a Liberal council?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend has clearly not been here for this debate—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eggar: I am sorry, Madam Speaker, I was responding to an intervention by my hon. Friend—

Madam Speaker: Order. In any event, the Minister should be addressing the House.

Mr. Eggar: I apologise. I was trying to respond to a sedentary intervention from behind.

Madam Speaker: Order. Sedentary remarks are not interventions.

Mr. Eggar: I heard something behind me, Madam Speaker. My hon. Friend said that Clydebank council sounded like a Liberal council. He was obviously not here to witness a great event: the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) came down on our side. The Liberals are going to join us in the Division to support the Bill. It was the hon. Member for Clackmannan who sat on the fence. He was in favour of this and against that. I have watched with considerable interest his struggle over this Bill inside the Labour party over the past few months. It has been a battle between neanderthal man, ably represented in this debate by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church), the old believer in clause IV, supported at one stage by the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), and modern Labour party man, as represented by the hon. Member for Clackmannan.

In October the hon. Gentleman made a courageous speech asking the Government to legislate as quickly as possible to introduce competition to the gas market. It was an important and thoughtful speech, a brave attempt to get the Labour party to seize the high ground in favour of competition. It was especially brave because he knew perfectly well that his hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was in the neanderthal camp—against competition and the privatisation of British Gas. He represented the other view of Clydebank council.

Of course this was before the hon. Member for Livingston sold his conscience for the shadow Foreign Secretaryship. Greater love hath no man than that he give up 75 years of Labour party history for promotion, which is what the hon. Gentleman did when he turned turtle and opposed his old position on the retention of clause IV.

Dr. Reid *rose—*

Mr. Eggar: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because I have a lot of sympathy with him; I know that he is engaged in a fierce battle with the Transport and General Workers Union, and he needs all the publicity he can get.

Dr. Reid: Yes, I have the guts to make a decision. Let us see what the Minister's guts are like tonight. Will he make a courageous decision? Does he support the faction, led by the Prime Minister, in the Cabinet that finds excessive pay and share options distasteful and needing regulation; or the faction led by his immediate boss at the Board of Trade, who is loth even to investigate these obscene pay increases and who regards any such investigation as unwarranted interference in the market?

Mr. Eggar: That intervention will not help the hon. Gentleman with his brothers in the Transport and General Workers Union one bit. He will have to fight that battle in his constituency. I should like to deal with the reasoned amendment that has been tabled by the Opposition. It also refers to top people's pay in the gas industry. I shall pick up the hon. Gentleman's points at that stage.

The reasoned amendment states that the Bill

"fails to provide effective safeguards for consumers".

Mr. Enright *rose—*

Mr. Eggar: Opposition Members, including the hon. Gentleman, should listen to what the Consumers Association says about the Bill. It states:

"The Bill should lead to all consumers benefiting from lower prices, improved service standards and a wider variety of service packages within the gas market from which to choose."

The Director General of the Gas Consumers Council, which is preserved in the Bill, said:

"The Council welcomes the Gas Bill as an imaginative solution to the difficulties of fast but orderly transition from a monopoly to a competitive market."

So the representatives of the consumer organisations support the Bill. We have dealt with every one of their concerns in the memorandum. If not, we will do so in the licence.

The reasoned amendment goes on to state that the Bill is damaging to many sections of the population and that it singles out the elderly and people living in the south-west. It appears that Opposition spokesmen are not aware of those people's views. The hon. Member for North Devon, my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) and GCC South-West have made clear that they welcome the fact that the south-west is the pilot area for the introduction.

So why does the reasoned amendment say that the Bill will harm the people of the south-west? That is not their view.

The amendment draws attention to the position of pensioners, the disabled and the blind. The fact is that all those groups will have their present standards of service preserved, maintained and, if appropriate, improved. I say to the hon. Member for Dagenham that an obligation will be placed on alternative gas suppliers to provide fitments for gas appliances and cookers, and other such services to customers.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I do not believe the Minister.

Mr. Eggar: I do not know whether you heard that sedentary intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman said that he did not believe me. I made a clear statement of Government policy from the Dispatch Box. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) has something to say, he should stand up and try to make an intervention. If not, it would be better if he kept quiet until he is allowed to intervene.

Mr. Eggar: That was typical of the hon. Gentleman. He does not bother to check his facts. He mutters into his beer belly—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. I have obviously maligned him. It was just the angle of the light. He has not got the guts to come to the Dispatch Box and to repeat his assertions because he knows that he has not done his research. *[Interruption.]* That would add to his beer belly.

The hon. Gentleman for Clackmannan referred to health and safety. I would like to welcome the Health and Safety Commission's work. The hon. Gentleman, who sat with me on the Committee that considered the Coal Industry Act, knows that I regard safety matters as paramount. The commission has identified the need for additional resources to underpin the new regime. The hon. Gentleman asked me, not unreasonably, about funding. I am discussing that matter with my Government colleagues, but there is no need at present for specific provision in the Bill for additional funding. I assure the hon. Gentleman that adequate resources will be made available.

Mr. O'Neill *rose—*

Mr. Eggar: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, he slightly overran his time.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan asked also about financial surety. We are determined to give consumers the assurance that they require, that the supply of gas to their homes will be maintained. Suppliers will have to satisfy the director general that they are financially sound. We intend also that suppliers will take out a bond—in effect, an insurance arrangement—to help maintain gas supply to consumers. In addition, the director general will have the ability to nominate a supplier to step in, as a last resort if another supplier fails and the market does not deal with the situation.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the concerns of small traders—such as my constituent, Mr. Eaton, whose business suffered from street works outside his shop? He was able to obtain compensation from North West Water but not, surprisingly, from British Gas.

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend has seen me about that complex case. I am studying and considering the various conflicting rights and obligations, and I assure my hon. Friend that I will give him another opportunity to discuss that matter with me.

As to regional electricity companies, having listened to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and to the hon. Member for Clackmannan, I remain unsure of the Opposition's concern. If it is lack of competition between suppliers of electricity and of gas, that can be dealt with through the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and normal competition policy. Other aspects can no doubt be covered in Committee.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) spoke of the need for energy efficiency. The Bill will increase the incentives for gas supply companies to offer consumers modern, energy-efficient gas installations—so in total, less gas will be consumed. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate that is likely to be an attractive selling point to many companies.

The Opposition believe that the regulator should in some way set senior employees' salaries.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister give way now?

Mr. Eggar: No. I am sorry.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that legislation will be considered in the light of the Greenbury committee. The suggestion that consumer price cuts should depend on the regulator operating, in effect, a top peoples' pay policy, shows a naive misunderstanding of the regulatory system and of basic mathematics.

If one takes the figures of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), even if the regulator returned to consumers all of Mr. Cedric Brown's 28 per cent. increase, that would amount to less than half of 1p per customer per year. The regulatory system sets prices—it does not attempt to control costs, which is for British Gas. If it can reduce its costs below those anticipated, it can increase profits and its competitiveness.

In short, by their amendment Opposition Members are proposing a pay policy through the regulator—not because that policy makes sense but because Labour, as ever, revels in the politics of envy. That assertion is all the more real because of what the right hon. Member for Copeland said in response to an intervention—

Mr. O'Neill *rose—*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 318.

Division No. 99] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Adams, Mrs Irene	Armstrong, Hilary
Ainger, Nick	Ashton, Joe
Allen, Graham	Austin-Walker, John
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*

Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'rshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian

Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(North Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 22.

Division No. 100] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*

Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G.*(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gordon, Mildred
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Lewis, Terry
Llwyd, Elfyn
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Patchett, Terry
Rooney, Terry
Skinner, Dennis
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alex Salmond and
Mr. Cynog Dafis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Madam Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put the money and the Ways and Means resolutions together.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): No.

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman want me to put the questions separately?

Mr. Michie: Yes.

Madam Speaker: In that case, I shall put the question on the money resolution.

GAS BILL [*Money*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Gas Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of the following, namely—

(a) the remuneration of, and any allowances or pensions payable to or in respect of, persons appointed—

(i) to carry out tests of apparatus and equipment, and tests of gas for the purpose of ascertaining whether it is of or above a declared calorific value;

(ii) to carry out tests of gas for the purpose of ascertaining whether it conforms with any prescribed standards; or

(iii) to examine and stamp, or authorise the stamping of, meters used for ascertaining the quantity of gas supplied through pipes;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act. *[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 49.

Division No. 101] **[10.29 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sh'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John

MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Michael Bates.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bradley, Keith
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Church, Judith
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Gunnell, John
Hardy, Peter
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jowell, Tessa
Lewis, Terry
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Reid, Dr John
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Watson, Mike
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Bill Michie.

Question accordingly agreed to.

GAS BILL *[Ways and Means]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Gas Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the inclusion in licences of conditions requiring the rendering of payments to the Director General of Gas Supply;

(b) the making of provisions under which monetary penalties may be imposed on persons who contravene any conditions or requirements; and

(c) the payment of any sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

Trafford Park Rail Terminal

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

10.41 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I thought that we were not going to reach this debate—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but clearly there is too much noise for him to be heard. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber please do so quickly and quietly?

Mr. Lloyd: This debate concerns the Euroterminal development at Trafford Park in my constituency. I know that the Minister for Railways and Roads is aware of its existence and I look forward to hearing his remarks in a few moments.

I must say in clear terms how badly let down my constituents feel by British Rail and, indeed, by central Government—and to a lesser extent by the Trafford park development corporation. Gorse Hill is a residential area, composed essentially of terraced housing. In recent years, it has become an area in which many people buy their first property. Indeed, some years ago, my first house was in that area, not far from the Euroterminal development. The residents feel let down because the area has suddenly been intruded on by the development of the Euroterminal. The development has a huge crane, which is having a severe impact on the local environment.

The development was sanctioned originally by the Secretary of State in April 1992 and work began some two months later. Almost no consultation took place with the local community or, indeed, the local council about the likely impact. I draw the Minister's attention to the contrast with the channel tunnel rail link and I quote one of his predecessors, the right hon. Member for Kettering, (Mr. Freeman), then Minister for Public Transport, who said in relation to the channel tunnel rail link:

"However, exacting design aims have been set for the rail link, not only for noise, but for all other areas of potential environmental impact, such as vibration. Our paper on property purchase and compensation policy explains that the thinking behind this is that it is better to limit the environmental intrusion at source . . . by putting the rail link in a cutting or providing mitigation in the form of noise barriers and landscaping, than to rely simply on compensation."—[*Official Report*, 31 March 1994; Vol.240, c. 1067.]

I hope that the Minister will take that on board. When the matter came to the Trafford magistrates court recently, the magistrates drew attention to the fact that, before the construction of the Euroterminal, neither Railfreight nor the Trafford park development corporation consulted Trafford borough council regarding noise or other environmental problems. Nor did they seek to discuss the matter with me or with the local community. I consider that disgraceful.

According to the stipendiary magistrate,

"No advice was sought by Railfreight from their in-house advisers or from the manufacturers regarding possible noise problem."

That is amazing, given that the development was so close to residences. The railway line is literally next to flats and houses. The magistrate also said:

"We now know that silent cranes were a possibility although they were more expensive."

British Rail, subsequently Railfreight, opted for a plan that was much worse in noise terms in order to save money, at the expense—both environmental and financial—of my constituents. That is difficult to justify.

I wrote to the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment pointing out that the development required no planning permission: as a statutory undertaking, British Rail is outside the planning permission regime. The Minister replied on 28 March 1994, nearly a year ago, saying that the Government did not consider planning permission necessary for a statutory undertaking. He wrote:

"We have issued guidance on the practice which statutory undertakings should follow in publicising development which they propose to carry out in exercise of their permitted development powers".

Sadly, both British Rail and the development corporation chose to ignore that guidance. I consider that to be unforgivable and unacceptable. When I put the point to the corporation and to Sir Bob Reid, chairman of British Rail, each blamed the other in a game of "pass the buck". That, too, is unacceptable.

The first problem experienced by my constituents may seem trivial, but it was the one that Sir Bob Reid seemed to latch on to when I met him. Their television reception was very poor, because the huge cranes act as an aerial, deflecting the signal. Just before Christmas 1993, Sir Bob told his assistant—whom I also met—"We must try to do something so that people do not lose their television reception over Christmas", but only in the early part of this year did British Rail and Railfreight finally get round to providing any kind of solution to the problem. I hope that the House agrees with my condemnation of BR's cavalier attitude to the interests of those whose lives were affected by its actions. Amazingly, even now only about 90 per cent. of those who experienced the problem have had their television reception restored, and I am told that the picture is not so good as it was originally; it is merely a good deal better than the terrible picture that they were obtaining. That may seem a small problem, but I do not think that it is so small nowadays, when we all take television for granted.

Much the most important problem, however, has been noise. Noise levels are now unacceptable, and the matter was recently brought to court. Having sought to reach an amicable deal with BR and Railfreight over a long period, Trafford council eventually lost patience and issued a noise abatement notice; BR protested, and sought to fight it. Only after the court hearing had been adjourned a number of times did BR finally come to court and admit that it was causing a statutory nuisance. That in itself is incredible: the development had been in progress for a full year before BR accepted that the noise level was a pollutant and constituted a statutory nuisance.

I hope that the Minister will join me in condemning BR and Railfreight for their casual attitude to those who have suffered. As I have said, BR could have opted for better technology which would have been much quieter, but considered its own costs more important than those of my constituents. As it has admitted its statutory duty, British Rail will now have to take some steps to ameliorate the problem because the court will make it do that. That compares with British Rail's lack of action to comply with rulings on other types of noise abatement.

[Mr. Lloyd]

I referred the Minister to the comments of his predecessor about the channel tunnel rail link, when it was said that prevention was better than cure. British Rail never tried to prevent these happenings. At a meeting in May 1994 it promised that an acoustic fence would be erected, but that promise did not materialise. British Rail simply lied, as it lied on a number of occasions about its actions.

When I again took the issue up with Sir Bob Reid in one of the many letters that I wrote to various people about noise, he said:

"We are talking about very large sums of money indeed in order to provide effective noise fencing."

British Rail may have been talking about large sums, but it never spent them because nothing happened. Sir Bob Reid may have been gullible or deliberately misleading. He is now on his way out of British Rail and perhaps he is no great loss. I am sure that he will make a great deal of money in the private sector. I hope that every now and again he will think about the loss of money that my constituents are suffering because of his inability to make acceptable decisions.

As I have said, the court has ordered British Rail to abate the noise. The problem is that under the legislation if British Rail can demonstrate to the court that it has taken all practical steps within acceptable financial limits, the court will override the original decision to tell British Rail to abate its noise nuisance and my constituents may face the prospect of having to put up with noise that is above the level set by the court.

Even if British Rail reduces the noise to the level that the court has ordered, it will still be very noisy. One of the anomalies of noise legislation is that in a quiet rural area where background noise is low, the permitted ability to increase noise is far less than in an area on the boundary between a residential area and an industrial zone. That means that because my constituents are in an environment which is less good than another, they are likely to suffer more because of the nature of our planning laws. That makes little sense to me and it makes even less sense to my constituents.

The nub of the debate is that, as a result of all this, my constituents have suffered real and material loss. For example, I have a letter from one of the local estate agents in Stretford. The company is called Trading Places and it wrote to the Gorse Hill residents committee. The letter is signed by J.B. Cox, a partner in Trading Places, and it states:

Over the past three years the prices of terraced property in Stretford and Gorse Hill have fallen by an average of 8 to 10 per cent. because of general market conditions."

We know that there has been a recession in property prices. The letter continues:

"However, in my opinion, the property in the Gorse Hill area has fallen by nearer to 13 per cent., and has gone from being a popular area for first time buyers, to an area which the first time buyers wish to avoid if they can possibly do so. Such people call into our office asking for property within an affordable price range stressing 'not Gorse Hill'. When asked why they wish to avoid the area the majority have said that is because of the reported problems with the 'Terminal'. I can therefore only assume that the additional fall in property prices within the Gorse Hill area is attributable to the 'Terminal' and the problems which have arisen since the building of the cranes."

One of my constituents had his house valued and believes that he may have lost about £10,000 on a house that would have been worth £54,000 before the development. In anybody's terms, that is a significant and unacceptable loss.

Another of my constituents wrote to say that she had contacted another estate agent, Maunders. She wrote:

"Maunders have said they won't touch anything in Gorse Hill as a Part Exchange deal because of the publicity they've seen about the terminus."

Therefore there is blight and a real loss in terms of property prices. I shall not mention his name, but I should like to draw the attention of the House to another constituent, an elderly man, whose wife is also elderly and sick. They lived in a block of flats which was right up against the operation of the crane. Because his wife was not well, my constituent decided to move. Perhaps unwisely, or because he was badly advised—who knows—he purchased another property some distance away. He then found himself, in his late 70s, unable to sell his flat, having already completed the purchase of the other property. He is now in considerable debt, desperately worried, and does not know what to do. He is certainly a victim, albeit badly advised, of the development of the Eurofreight terminal.

The Minister will not be surprised to learn that I want to discuss compensation with him today. I draw his attention to parallels with the channel tunnel rail link. I know that he and his predecessors have had many exchanges with, among others, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) about the operation of the Land Compensation Act 1973. I followed that debate with considerable interest. I would be grateful if the Minister told me tonight whether that Act applies—I believe that the parallels with the channel tunnel rail link are close. This case is actually even stronger, though.

In a previous debate the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Kettering, said:

"As hon. Members will know, it has been a long-standing policy of successive Governments to make a clear distinction in this respect between the construction or alteration of public works and the intensification of use of existing works."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1991; Vol.193, c.345-6.]

It is clear to me that this development is not an intensification of use; it is a fundamental change of use, from a rail track carrying goods trains to the presence of a huge crane intended to operate night and day. This is a clear case of construction and alteration of public works.

I believe, therefore, that the Land Compensation Act applies. I hope that the Minister will confirm that and declare that the Government expect my constituents to have their financial losses—if no other—recompensed under the system. I also draw his attention to some remarks of his own about the channel tunnel rail link, when he mentioned the system operated by Union Railways: a voluntary purchase scheme, whereby owners of property eventually to be compulsorily purchased can request Union Railways to purchase now. He went on to say that Union Railways also operate a discretionary purchase scheme for properties outside the channel tunnel rail link safeguarded zone

"on terms broadly comparable . . . to the scheme operated by the Highways Agency under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1995; Vol.256, c.124.]

Given the losses suffered by my constituents and the environmental pollution that they face every day and night, they are surely entitled to action on the part of the Government and of British Rail to undo the damage done.

This whole exercise shows that British Rail and its successor companies have treated the community that I represent with contempt, which has emanated from Sir Bob Reid and run throughout the system. That is unacceptable. I hope that the Minister will at least make the effort to ensure, in what is still a publicly run industry, that these views are communicated to those involved.

My constituents are entitled to some consideration for the losses that they have suffered. With the channel tunnel rail link—I do not wish to be divisive in such a packed House—in the leafier parts of southern England, it was accepted that it was necessary to come up with a prevention scheme to allay the fears of the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling. No such consideration or prevention scheme was provided for my constituents. I cannot accept that just because they live in the grimy north they should be treated worse.

Because of British Rail's failure to consult, and because the planning powers did not exist to make the local authority and the development corporation consult the local people properly, all this is now water under the bridge. All that can be done now is to ensure that Railfreight gets down to abating the noise and other environmental inconveniences. And because even that abatement will not stop the slide in property prices, there must ultimately be a compensation scheme adequately to recompense people whose lives have been harmed and who have suffered financial loss.

10.59 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on securing time to discuss the matter, and on explaining the concerns of his constituents so clearly. I should like briefly to sum up the wider background to the development of the terminal before I deal with his specific points.

Intermodal transport is likely to provide a major opportunity for growth in the freight market for rail in Europe. In the past 15 years, the European railways' market share in the domestic freight market has decreased to about 7 per cent. Markets traditionally suited to rail have contracted because of wider structural changes in the economy, while the movement of finished goods has, so far, proved almost the exclusive province of road haulage.

The United Kingdom, however, in common with other European Community countries, views the development of intermodal transport as a key factor in the development of freight business for the railway. Trafford Park Euroterminal has been developed in that context and as an important part of a new network of terminals to take advantage of channel tunnel opportunities. It is situated on an industrial estate close to a long-established terminal that has handled the domestic and the region's deep-sea intermodal business, known as freightliner, for many years. To make best use of resources, freightliner operations were moved to the new site on a temporary basis.

The Euroterminal layout and cranage capacity were designed to cater for about 100,000 containers per annum. The initial channel tunnel service, together with the freightliner business in the region, are now achieving those figures. Therefore, the old Trafford Park site is being recommissioned, used once again for freightliner traffic, and is to be offered in the freightliner package for sale.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has found the consultation by British Rail so inadequate. I shall reflect on the detailed criticisms that he made about the basis on which consultation has been pursued. In his view and that of his constituents, it has been pursued inadequately. British Rail has pursued a policy of co-operating with local authorities to accommodate the concerns of local communities. Wherever possible, practical measures have been introduced to try to eliminate the effects on the local environment. I agree with his point that it is far better to design out problems at the outset, where that is possible, than to undertake remedial action when a problem has arisen, which appears to be the case here.

Following the start of operations at Trafford Park Euroterminal, British Rail received a number of complaints from residents. It has sought various practical measures to deal with those concerns. For example, I understand that there was a problem involving overspill from lighting and glare from the terminal lighting. I am told that that has been resolved.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned interference to television reception and acknowledged that British Rail had taken some action in erecting a new transmitter and in undertaking the reorientation of aerials, but he explained that the implementation of that work took far too long. I am aware that, following landscaping work, residents experienced a temporary problem with rodent infestation, but I am advised that that has also been resolved.

A council study has shown that pollution in the region did not differ from the prevailing level there. I am told that a council study into vibration from the site has proved inconclusive. The hon. Gentleman raised the matter of noise and the Land Compensation Act 1973. He explained that the development was undertaken under general development orders that did not require normal planning permission. The Act allows for compensation to be paid when property value is adversely affected by physical factors such as noise and vibration from new or altered public works, including railways. It does not specify precisely what is meant by altered works in the case of railways, although it does refer to work that is reconstructed, extended or otherwise altered. Interpretation of the law is not for Ministers but for the courts, but the hon. Gentleman and his constituents might conclude that there could be valid claims for compensation under the provisions of that legislation.

As the hon. Gentleman explained, Trafford Park borough council brought an application for a noise abatement order before magistrates last autumn, following representations from local residents about noise nuisance at night from the terminal site. Initially, the court imposed a noise target of 41 decibels throughout the night hours and gave British Rail 90 days to introduce the necessary measures. In BR's view, those noise targets were technically infeasible. By way of comparison, a domestic refrigerator generates about 40 decibels.

In response, the British Railways Board obtained independent advice about noise levels at the site, conducted further tests and put forward noise targets that would be technically feasible. Magistrates considered that

[Mr. John Watts]

evidence and in the light of advice given in British Standard 4142 and limits recommended by the World Health Organisation for sleep disturbance, amended the noise target during night hours to 47 decibels.

British Rail has started the works needed to bring about that noise reduction. The work includes cladding for the cranes and erection of an acoustic fence. Once the work is complete and noise level tests have been conducted, the terminal will reopen at night. Until then, channel tunnel trains have been rescheduled to avoid the night hours, and freightliner traffic is now using the adjacent terminal.

The acoustic fence contract has been let, and work should be completed by the end of May. Mechanical modifications to the cranes should bring about a reduction in airborne noise by the end of this month. Further reductions are proposed for structure-borne noise.

Staff training has also been reviewed to reduce unnecessary noise, and equipment has been fitted with reminder notices to prompt staff to use it considerately. British Rail has also requested double glazing quotations from three national suppliers to meet the problems specific to the top floor of maisonettes in Stanton street. It is clear that BR has made, and continues to make, strenuous efforts to operate the Euroterminal with regard for the local environment.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: British Rail has at last made some effort, but it is more than a year since the terminal began to operate. My constituents have suffered a whole year because British Rail did not get it right in the first place.

Mr. Watts: I have taken on board the hon. Gentleman's point that the efforts were made far too late for his constituents and to satisfy him. However unfortunate the history, and whatever the lessons for the future, it is only right to consider what has been done and is being done to overcome the problems inflicted on the hon. Gentleman's constituents. Strenuous efforts are being made, if not as early as they ought to have been, to operate the new terminal with regard for the local environment.

As demand builds for BR's European services, more freightliner traffic will revert to the original Trafford Park terminal. Whatever the growth of European business for the north-west, capacity for container handling at the Euroterminal is limited to 100,000 containers per year, so there should not be substantial further intensification of activity. Until the recent restriction on night use, those levels were already being reached.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman and local residents will draw some comfort from the measures that have been completed or are under way.

Mr. Lloyd: British Rail has been reluctant in the matter; it has been forced to act by the courts. Even the levels of noise about which we are talking are a significant increase. The decibel scale is not a linear scale, but a logarithmic scale. The extra 5 decibels makes an awful lot of difference. It means that there is an awful lot more noise than is made by the domestic refrigerator. If the Minister lived in such circumstances, would he, having seen his property devalued, want compensation?

Mr. Watts: If I felt that my property had been devalued, I would make use of the provision that is available in the law to press a claim for compensation. I have tried to be as helpful as I can be in explaining what the provisions of the Land Compensation Act 1973 are, without venturing into territory that is not proper for me, which is to attempt to interpret what the law means. It would be foolish of a Minister, especially one who is a chartered accountant and not a lawyer by professional training, to try to give an interpretation of what the law means in its application to a particular case. The law is there and it can be used if individuals feel that they have a valid claim under it.

I hope that the measures that are under way or completed and, perhaps, a rather more sensitive attitude to the management of the facility in the future will give some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman and to his constituents that attempts will be made to minimise the nuisance that arises from the operation of the terminal. It is, of course, a facility that is important to the development of freight business. It will be of benefit to the region in which the hon. Gentleman's constituency is situated. I know that he will recognise those benefits. Equally, it is important that we strike a balance and that the environmental costs to his constituents are not allowed to be too high in relation to the benefits that accrue. I hope that he will take some reassurance back to his constituents that measures to minimise nuisance will be continued into the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 14 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Multiple Sclerosis

1. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further research her Department will be conducting in 1995 into the possible causes of multiple sclerosis; and if she will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to you, Madam Speaker, and to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), to explain that today she is leading a trade mission to Japan and Korea to boost British medical exports and to bring inward investment and jobs to Britain.

To my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Sir D. Madel), I reply that such research is mainly commissioned by the Medical Research Council and is the responsibilty of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Department of Health does, however, have a programme of research which includes work on service delivery for people with multiple sclerosis.

Sir David Madel: In view of successful trials in the United States and completion of trials in the United Kingdom, will the drug beta interferon be available for multiple sclerosis sufferers on the national health service in the autumn and will trials on the drug rolipram begin in Britain this year?

Mr. Bowis: As my hon. Friend knows, the cause of multiple sclerosis is not known, so as yet there is no cure. The research and clinical trials to which he refers have been on drugs to alleviate symptoms of the disease. Beta interferon, as a biotechnology product, now comes under the European Medicines Evaluation Agency and I cannot say whether, when or in what form a licence will be granted by it. The Medicines Control Agency in Britain has not yet approved any clinical trials on rolipram because no such proposals have yet been put to it.

GP Fundholders

2. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions apply to GP fundholders in respect of using public money to improve their property portfolio.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): General practitioner fundholders may, with the agreement of their regional health authority, use audited savings for the benefit of their patients. This includes improving their surgeries to provide a wide range of services.

Mr. MacShane: Is there not growing concern among medical practitioners that some—not all—fundholders are not treating a required number of patients in order to improve the value of their property so that at the end of their practice they can sell it and make a large personal profit? If a doctor approaching retirement has a choice between 10 hip operations or adding £100,000 to the value of his property, that is a choice introduced by the Government to allow fundholding doctors to turn themselves into small businesses and put profit before patients.

Mr. Malone: I hope that every general practitioner fundholder across the land will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said, which is a slur on most of them, on those whom he was mentioning, and noted his tendentious use of the words "property portfolio" in his question when what he should have said was surgery premises. It is not unusual for public funds to be made available for the improvement of premises. That was always the case when grants were made available before to improve the capital asset with precisely the same effect as if GP fundholders use their savings now. I just wish that the hon. Gentleman would bear in mind the additional services that are being provided for patients—the improvements, the physiotherapy and the capital equipment that is brought into the premises. Fundholding is a great success and it does doctors no good when the hon. Gentleman denigrates them in that way.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind the fact that more and more GP practices are opting for fundholding with clear benefits to patients throughout the country, is my hon. Friend aware that the Opposition are now in as much of a muddle about the future of health care as they are on education? Will he give some help to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to sort that out?

Mr. Malone: Not only am I keen to help the right hon. Lady; I have already done so. I wrote to her yesterday asking whether she might now be prepared to clarify her party's position on this important point. Perhaps she will have an opportunity to say whether she agrees with the Leader of the Opposition, and reveal that yet another layer of veneer is to be added to left-wing policies.

Residential Care

3. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she intends to take to improve residential care for the elderly.

Mr. Bowis: Our inspection regime ensures that local authority-run homes are inspected against the same standards as are expected of independent sector homes, and we have now applied citizens charter principles to both. Standards also of course benefit from the statutory direction on choice, which gives residents the right to choose their home.

Mr. Denham: Is the Minister aware of the anger and fear felt by elderly people whose homes, life savings and partners' pensions are confiscated to pay for residential care? Is he aware that, as the *Southern Daily Echo* has pointed out, those who can plan ahead and pay legal fees

can avoid high charges, while others cannot? Is it not clear that residential care is now a national lottery in which frail elderly people are losing control of the type, quality and cost of the care that they need?

Mr. Bowis: What is certainly clear is that such comments do nothing but undermine elderly people's confidence in the excellent care provided by residential care and nursing homes throughout the country—and, indeed, by social services departments and health authorities working together.

If the hon. Gentleman knows anything about the matter, he will know that there have been no changes in the principles of charging for social care since the founding of the welfare state in 1948. What was good enough for Beveridge and Aneurin Bevan—and, more recently, for Sir Gordon Borrie in the Labour party's own Commission on Social Justice—should be good enough for the hon. Gentleman: while of course people must look to the costs of their own social care, their health care will continue to be free at the point of delivery. That includes residential care.

No one, but no one, risks the eviction of his or her spouse from the home because of charging policy, as some have suggested. That is specifically excluded, as is the eviction of any dependent relative, and the spouse's normal standard of living will also be taken into account.

Mr. Rowe: Is my hon. Friend aware of the admirable plan of Kent's director of social services to involve local communities much more closely in residential homes? Does he agree that such a clear use of the voluntary spirit should be encouraged, and will he do his utmost to encourage those admirable ideas?

Mr. Bowis: Yes. We should involve all the relevant agencies in the planning of social care, including social services departments, health authorities, GPs and the voluntary sector—and, of course, users and carers themeselves. My hon. Friend is right to point out that volunteers can play an important part in the provision of services: they can back up the statutory agencies, and many can gain great benefits themselves from supporting others.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Given that the Government have cut 50,000 local authority care home beds, and the Department of the Environment's current proposal to remove the statutory requirement for local councils to provide their own care homes, will the Minister explain how his concept of choice applies to elderly people who choose to enter local authority care homes?

Mr. Bowis: Would that some of the local authorities that are run by the hon. Gentleman's party gave individual residents and potential residents real choice. Real choice is informed choice, not just the choice between two local authority homes.

If a local authority believes, as many do, that it can secure better quality at a better price from the independent sector, that will be good for residents and taxpayers. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have the grace to welcome it.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my hon. Friend aware that Lancashire has many excellent county and privately run residential homes? Is he further aware that it costs £93 a week or, in total, £10.8 million more to keep people in county-run rather than private sector homes? Should that matter not be looked into so that that £10.8 million could be spent in other ways?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right. As I go around the country and see the excellent provision by the independent sector, which is scorned and spurned by some local authorities for ideological reasons, I consider the cost of that provision and I notice, as my hon. Friend says, the savings that could be made. That could provide better quality and, very often, better comfort for individuals, and leave more money to be spent on people in need. Where hon. Members see such a waste of money, I hope that they will unfailingly send the details of it to the district auditor so that it can be considered in his assessment of value for money in local government.

GP Fundholders

4. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about GP fundholders' savings.

Mr. Malone: Fundholders have achieved efficiency savings of nearly £110 million over the first three years of the scheme. That is about 3.5 to 4 per cent. of budgets set. That money is being reinvested in health services for the benefit of patients. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, for example, it has been reinvested in physiotherapy services, the purchase of electro-cardiogram equipment machines, more space for doctors to practise and additional nursing cover. I am sure that he will welcome all that.

Mr. Milburn: Why should a minority of family doctors be allowed to sit on what amounts to a huge public subsidy when more than 1 million people are waiting for hospital treatment? What action is the Minister prepared to take to ensure that public resources are made available now for all members of the public, or is he content merely to see the further development of a two-tier NHS?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman's expertise in these matters seems to extend no further than Essex, where he finds woks for sale in GP fundholders' premises. I am glad that he has treated the House to something slightly more serious than that. As he knows, those savings are spent on a rolling basis. Plans are not only agreed with the regional health authority but audited on an on-going basis. The money is spent on a year-on-year basis on patient care. I should have thought that, because much of that has happened in his constituency, he might have welcomed it.

Mrs. Roe: Does my hon. Friend agree that the ability to make savings that can then be spent on more and better patient care is one of the main benefits that GP fundholding has been shown to have? Does he further agree that one of the places where that message has been heard loudest and clearest is the region represented by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), where nearly three quarters of the population have a GP fundholder—twice the national average?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is quite right. I had the pleasure of visiting the regional health authority that covers that area. It explained how enthusiastic GP fundholders in the right hon. Lady's constituency were in taking up the challenge that the policy offers, and in

bringing benefits to their patients. They will understand that it is a policy that, at least until yesterday, we understood that the Opposition were going to abolish.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that any benefits available to the patients of GP fundholders should be at least equally available to patients of non-fundholders who join joint commissioning arrangements, such as those that exist in Nottingham? Will he commend joint commissioning arrangements? If any savings are achieved from fundholding, will he consider applying them to the nearly 900,000 people who have been struck off dentists' NHS lists since the previous general election?

Mr. Malone: The hon. and learned Gentleman raises an interesting point about people who will not join GP fundholding practices, but who provide the benefits by other means. Of course, GP fundholding is voluntary. That is the preferred way of moving forward in a primary care-led NHS. That will continue to be the case, but, if others choose another means and manage to learn from the best practice that has been made available by GP fundholders, I welcome that.

Administrative Posts

5. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which administrative posts in the NHS are normally filled by nurses, doctors or other medically qualified persons; which are normally filled by people with other than medical qualifications; and if she will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): All NHS trust boards must have a qualified medical director and a suitably qualified nurse as director of nursing. Otherwise, it is a matter for individual NHS bodies to decide what skills, expertise and experience are required.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that medical people are best placed to understand the medical needs of hospitals and other facilities in the NHS? Will he make it a priority to appoint them to administrative posts, where their medical experience can be used, and please can we have the matron back in hospitals?

Mr. Sackville: On the last point, many of my hon. Friends used to show a marked predilection for a strong woman in charge. I have no objection to the person in charge of nursing, or of any other responsibilities, being styled as matron or, indeed, patron.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Under-Secretary recognise that not only has the number of those described as general and senior managers quadrupled since the Government's changes were introduced but the pay bill for those posts has trebled? Has the Under-Secretary seen the recent figures produced by the National Health Service Consultants Association, which show that, overall, the administrative costs of the health service are twice what they were before the Government introduced their so-called reforms? At a time when we are constantly being told that there is not enough money to provide essential care, does that not show how the Government waste public money?

Mr. Sackville: I remind the right hon. Lady that a large proportion of the additional managers have been reclassified from their previous posts and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) has admitted as much. I remind her also that half all managers come from a clinical background. If the right hon. Lady is worried about this, she should look to see that activity in hospitals has increased enormously. Outcomes have improved and waiting lists are down as a result of good management of hospitals. Hospitals do not manage themselves; they need good, committed managers.

Mr. Lord: My hon. Friend's response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) was tinged with a certain amount of humour, which is always the case when matron's name is raised in the House. Does my hon. Friend agree that the matron was probably the most important and effective post in hospitals throughout their history? It was a sad day when the post of matron was abandoned. If the Minister wants to do something that will have a major effect on the way our hospitals are run, he could go back to his office this afternoon and write a letter to every hospital in the country, recommending that they reintroduce the post of matron without delay. Will he consider doing that?

Mr. Sackville: Every hospital has the opportunity to recreate the post of matron, and some are doing so.

Specialist Appointments

7. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she proposes to ensure early specialist appointments following GP referrals.

Mr. Sackville: For the first time, we have introduced a national waiting time standard for out-patient appointments.

Mr. Lewis: After that unsatisfactory reply, will the Under-Secretary consider the effect of the 18-month demand on consultants which is required by the patients charter? Will he look at Withington hospital in south Manchester, where consultants are now writing to GPs saying that, because of that demand, they cannot accept further referrals? That is another hidden waiting list and it is time that the Minister got off his fat backside and started to tackle the problem properly.

Mr. Sackville: The history of waiting lists and waiting times has been a major success of the NHS reforms. All the unacceptably long waits have been removed. Guarantees are being offered for out-patient appointments as well as for in-patients and for those waiting for operations, and the average waiting time has come down from nine to five months. That is a very real achievement.

Mr. Garnier: Is my hon. Friend aware of the re-engineering project that has been carried out at Leicester Royal infirmary, which has enabled out-patients to see specialists and technicians at one place and during one appointment so that GPs receive the answers to their referrals within hours rather than weeks, which was previously the case? Is that not an example that should be followed by other NHS trusts and hospitals?

Mr. Sackville: Yes, I congratulate Leicestershire on its achievement. We hope to encourage exactly that sort of initiative everywhere.

Mental Health Care

8. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new proposals she has to improve mental health care.

Mr. Bowis: A large range of measures for in-patient and community services is being implemented, and our new Mental Health Bill is being considered in another place.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that not only are mixed-sex wards unacceptable and distressing to patients, but so are wards which have an unacceptable range of mental ill health? A 22-year-old young woman constituent of mine, who had suffered a nervous breakdown, found herself sharing a ward with people who were deeply psychotic and she was assaulted twice by a young male patient. Is it not utterly unacceptable that our mental hospitals, as a result of the Government's changes, have been turned into places which increase anxiety and stress to staff and patients?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman refers to a hospital which is in his constituency in Wales and, therefore, is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. I understand that Welsh questions were yesterday. I shall, however, answer in the general sense, since the matter applies to English health questions as well. It is appropriate that every health authority in the country should look at its range of provision and ensure that it meets what it assesses locally as being its need. That is what we have been encouraging them to do and that is what they are doing. We are looking for the right mix of acute beds, long-term beds, medium-term beds, low, medium and high-secure beds and a range of facilities in the community. They are being provided in most parts of the country and we are determined that they will be provided in all parts of the country.

Mr. Sims: My hon. Friend will recall that about 12 months ago, the Select Committee on Health issued a report on these matters, in which it criticised the Government for the delay in implementing the homeless mentally ill initiative and for the lack of co-operation between his Department and the Department of the Environment. Will he assure me that those problems have been addressed and that the provision of housing for the mentally ill under that initiative is proceeding?

Mr. Bowis: Yes. I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He will also recall that the homeless mentally ill initiative has been a remarkable success story, not least because of the outreach teams which have been reaching increasing numbers of homeless mentally ill people. The initiative has also been a tremendous success in providing accommodation, the first stage of which has been hostel accommodation. I have opened a number of hostels around London and I am due to open another one shortly.

My hon. Friend is also right to point to the need for a good system of agreed move-on accommodation. In the past, lack of that has caused delays. That is why we have been working closely with our colleagues in the Department of the Environment and why we have also been working closely with the inner London boroughs especially. I am pleased to say that some helpful progress has been made by those boroughs for future provision.

Mr. Illsley: Is it not the case that the Government are bringing forward controversial, unpopular and piecemeal initiatives on mental health rather than addressing the real issues such as the diversion of resources away from mental health into other parts of the national health service, the closure of long-stay institutions, the lack of a comprehensive strategy for mental health and the relationship between mental health and homelessness, unemployment and sexual and racial discrimination? Is it not time that the Government addressed the whole matter of mental health and perhaps committed themselves to a complete review of the Mental Health Act 1983?

Mr. Bowis: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been. One of the five key parts of "The Health of the Nation" strategy is mental illness. We have been working hard with all the agencies involved to improve the standing of people with mental health problems. He will also know that we have been implementing our 10-point plan over the past 18 months, which has ranged from supervision registers and hospital discharge guidance through the training of key workers to supervised discharge, which is in the Mental Health Bill that is before Parliament.

Resources to the tune of £2.3 billion have been put into mental health this year. Through social services, we have been putting money into local government provision to the tune of some £180 million and our mental illness specific grant has supported 1,000 schemes and 100,000 people. The missing link to which the Blom-Cooper and other reports have referred was partly supervised discharge and partly medium-secure beds. Those were missing because, during the previous Labour Government, not a single bed was provided, whereas we shall be providing some 1,300 beds by 1996.

Health Authorities Bill

9. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made by her Department of the likely savings to be made for the health services as a result of the Health Authorities Bill; and what savings will be made.

12. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates have been made of the savings resulting from the abolition of the regional health authorities.

Mr. Malone: The provisions of the Health Authorities Bill, which will abolish regional health authorities and require district health authorities and family health services authorities to merge, will result in annual savings approaching £150 million by 1997-98. Some £100 million of the total savings will result from the abolition of the RHAs and the consequent reduction in the overlap of work between the national health service executive and the regions. All those savings will be retained by the NHS and reinvested in patient care.

Mr. Thomason: I welcome that answer. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the changes will mean that there will be more money available for patient care, whereas Labour's proposals to create strategic health planning would take money away? Does my hon. Friend agree that

this is another case in which the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) should tell the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) that she has got it wrong again?

Mr. Malone: I would never presume to tell the right hon. Member for Sedgefield what messages he should give to the right hon. Member for Derby, South. All I notice occasionally is that, when he gives them, she does not pay a blind bit of notice to them; but never mind that. The position set out by my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course those funds will be available for patient care. I noted, when the Health Authorities Bill was in Committee, that the Labour party wanted to reimpose bureaucracy and to take the money that would be available for patients away.

Mr. Martin: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the welcome abolition of Wessex regional health authority is part of a general and consistent assault on bureaucracy throughout the national health service, not least in hospitals themselves? Can he confirm that the savings created from this will go not only to patient care, but to ensuring that consultants working in hospitals can get on with treating patients rather than worrying about paperwork?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right. The Government have a consistent record of cutting bureaucracy not only in administering the NHS and the country, but within the Department of Health, in Whitehall and in the NHS executive. Constantly paring away bureaucracy means that funds are released for patient care. That is a proud record, which the Labour party tries to interfere with and upset.

Mr. Barry Jones: How many additional nurses will result from the savings?

Mr. Malone: The sum of £100 million a year is substantial. When it is redirected into the purchasing process, it will allow a substantial increase in activity. That figure would represent something approaching—this is a top-of-my-head calculation at the Dispatch Box to which I am sure the hon. Gentleman will not hold me—20,000 cardiac bypass operations. The hon. Gentleman wants to put the figure in the scale of things and to know what it will mean for patients; that is a pretty good try.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This is a refinement of the way in which the Minister answered the question in Committee. As he says that there is extra money to invest in the national health service, will he now explain to the House what the Prime Minister meant last Thursday when he said that there was available in Leeds

"a highly specialised form of treatment"?—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 454.]

By implication, such treatment was not available in Greater London. Is such a facility to be made available in Greater London? What exactly is available in Leeds and not available in Greater London?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman will know that he is distorting my right hon. Friend's words in a ridiculous way. First-class health services are available across the country, not least because the Government have put into place policies that mean that more money is directed straight to patient care than is absorbed by the rest of the service. That is why first-class services are available across the land. It is wrong of the hon. Gentleman to treat my right hon. Friend's remark in that way.

Human Embryos

10. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority about the freezing of human embryos.

Mr. Sackville: Officials of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority are in close contact with those of my Department on the matter. When the authority has reported and submitted its review of current arrangements we shall consider whether further action is appropriate.

Mr. Alton: In how many cases has contact been lost with the parents of the 30,000 human embryos that have been frozen in the past decade? Will an amendment to the law to prevent those embryos from being destroyed when their shelf-life expires next year be among the proposed courses of action that the Minister has said will be considered? What account is being taken of the evidence published in *The Lancet* in the past month or so showing that the freezing of mouse embryos has led to mutations occurring in the mice subsequently born?

Mr. Sackville: Clearly there will be many such cases, but the hon. Gentleman must remember that Parliament decided that treatment involving the implantation of embryos should go ahead, and that a feature of such treatment is storage.

Mr. Foulkes: Speak up.

Mr. Sackville: Parliament agreed a maximum period of five years for the storage of embryos. That raises many sensitive issues, which is why the authority is now considering the matter.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) did not talk so much he might be able to hear the Minister.

Dr. Spink: Has my hon. Friend had time yet to review the accounts of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority that were published yesterday? If so, did he note that it will receive about 70 per cent. of its income next year from licence fees? Does he not think that that puts the gamekeeper a little too close to the poacher? Is there not an inconsistency here? Can he tell me how many licences have been revoked or withheld in the past year?

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend's use of the word "poacher" is inappropriate, if I may say so. I have the highest regard for the people who work for the authority and for the way in which they carry out a very sensitive job. I believe that we are respected throughout the world for having set up an authority to regulate this difficult area, and I know of no reason for any suspicion of a conflict of interests of the sort that my hon. Friend alleges.

GP Fundholding

11. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend general practitioner fundholding; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: In October 1994 we announced a major extension of the options for general practitioner

fundholding, the development of a community option and the expansion of standard fundholding. In addition we continue to look at other services and other ways to develop the benefits that can be achieved through fundholding. Our aim is to extend the benefits for patients as widely as possible.

Lady Olga Maitland: Is my hon. Friend aware that although 30 per cent. of my constituents enjoy the excellent services of GP fundholders, none the less that percentage is below the national average? What steps will he take to ensure that my constituents in Sutton and Cheam enjoy the same benefits as other people who are patients of GP fundholders?

Mr. Malone: I am sure that my hon. Friend will take her own steps, as she regularly does, to ensure that all general practitioners in her constituency are aware that fundholding status is available to them. Under the new scheme, about 85 per cent. of GPs are now eligible for fundholding status, and we fully expect the percentage of the population covered to increase dramatically over the next year or so. We are seeing progress to that end, and we expect that progress to be maintained.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Before extending GP fundholding, will the Minister look back at the answers to the questions that I have asked about it? He replied that he did not hold the information centrally and referred me to the regional health authority and the family health services authority. Is he aware that the regional health authority has given me two different figures covering the constituency of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), which in terms of underspending are more than £100,000 apart? For Camden and Islington, the figure given by the regional health authority is almost twice that given by the FHSA. Does the Minister agree that until he can get his house in order, monitor the figures and find out what is happening to the underspend, he should not extend the practice further?

Mr. Malone: Again, the hon. Gentleman is simply trying to deny the fact that fundholding brings additional benefits for patients, and I am surprised that Opposition Members have not caught up with the news.

Mr. Olner: It is a fiddle.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Member had better not say that to the Leader of the Opposition, as the Labour party has now changed its policy on the subject.

The figures taken over time from family health services authorities and the regions will give different snapshots, but they will be consistent once they have worked through the system. I reiterate that funds that are made available for patient care according to plans approved by the region and by fundholding practices have been passed by the Audit Commission. I could not suggest anything to the hon. Gentleman that could be more stringent than that. It is a quite proper use of public funds for patient care.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: As more than 90 per cent. of my constituents will soon be enjoying the benefits of being treated by GP fundholders, does my hon. Friend agree that they will find the remarks of Opposition Members—particularly the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane)—deeply offensive? Does he agree that total fundholding as practised originally in Bromsgrove and now being extended to Bewdley in my constituency is a way forward to make GP fundholders the real gatekeeper of health services and to ensure that those services reach ever-higher standards for patients?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right. I have visited a number of total fundholding pilot projects, including one in Bath last week which will get under way on 1 April. They are exciting projects that must be evaluated, but remarkable achievements have already been recorded by projects that are under way. Progress to date has been extremely good.

Mrs. Beckett: Is the Minister aware that we receive literally dozens of letters from GPs protesting that, under instructions from Ministers, managers in their areas are attempting to browbeat them into becoming fundholders whether they wish to or not? That view is reflected in a survey in *Pulse*, which shows that 71 per cent. of GPs do not wish to become fundholders. Has the Minister seen the advertisement that has been placed in East Anglian newspapers by 32 GPs in Suffolk who are not fundholders? The advertisement states that the GPs are saving the Treasury more than £200,000 a year, and that not one penny of that money is available for patient care. Why is the Minister trying to force people to become fundholders when the practice is unproven, inequitable and very expensive?

Mr. Malone: That is marvellous, because the Leader of the Opposition is trying to force the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to support fundholding practices. We did not hear the right hon. Lady say today whether she agrees with the change in Labour party policy.

There is no question of forcing anybody to become a GP fundholder. Of course, GPs are encouraged to do so because it is the way forward in a primary care-led NHS. The vast majority of GPs who become fundholders—sometimes, I concede to the right hon. Lady, reluctantly—usually end up being in the vanguard of those praising the system and the benefits it can bring, which include an extension of clinical expertise that GPs are able to deploy directly to patients. They are enthusiastic about it, but it is still a voluntary process. I still wish to see more people join the scheme.

Mr. Hayes: In my hon. Friend's busy day—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for the applause. Will my hon. Friend take time to be magnanimous and act as a mediator between the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), the Leader of the Opposition and, I suspect, the deputy leader of the Labour party—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question that relates to ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Hayes: This is precisely to do with GP fundholders and NHS trusts, because the right hon. Lady wants to get rid of them while the Leader of the Opposition wants to keep them. Will my hon. Friend help the right hon. Lady out?

Mr. Malone: I am always prepared to be magnanimous, but I am afraid that I am not prepared to be quite as magnanimous as that.

Performance-related Pay

13. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how performance-related pay will be calculated for NHS employees; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: These are matters for local determination by national health service employers, having regard to the contributions made by staff to high-quality patient care.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the Minister realise that performance-related pay is totally inappropriate to the health service and that the practices of the supermarket and the office floor cannot be applied to doctors and nurses, whose jobs are to care for patients and to save lives? Whatever happened to the promise made by the then Minister of State on 23 November 1994 that the Government had no intention of introducing performance-related pay into the health service?

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Gentleman will know that there are plenty of precedents in the health service, such as merit awards for senior medical staff. It is absolutely right that local employers should have the maximum freedom in how they spend the larger part of their resources, which is for salaries. We have given trusts the freedom to make decisions. One of those decisions is on pay.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister compares merit awards with performance-related pay. The former is based on comparison with peers and we can understand why it is done, but may we have some definitive, objective guidelines on how performance-related pay can operate in the health service? Will it mean that the more patients a trust gets through the door the more people will be paid? Is that performance-related pay?

Mr. Sackville: It is up to each trust to make those decisions. I remind the hon. Gentleman that some 60 trusts have already published offers between 1.5 per cent. and 3 per cent., as recommended by the pay review body. The majority of offers are at the higher level. I expect that trend to continue.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is currently on an official visit to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan. He is accompanied by a large delegation of British business people.

Mrs. Liddell: The visit of the Prime Minister to the Gaza strip and the donation of equipment and aid are to be welcomed, but why have the Government chosen to donate police equipment when the entire community could have benefited from the excellence of British manufacturing facilities to provide clean water facilities, better health facilities and educational facilities?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady clearly was not listening. I said that a large delegation of British business people was with the Prime Minister precisely to see whether we can help with the kind of opportunities to which she refers.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my right hon. Friend share my disgust at the blatant and continued misrepresentation by press and media of the case of the 10-year-old leukaemia sufferer? Is he aware that Cambridge health authority's decision to refuse treatment had nothing to do with money but was taken because the overwhelming number of doctors and specialists were not prepared to inflict further suffering on that poor little girl?

Mr. Newton: It certainly has been made clear by the health authority that funds would have been available if the view of the doctors responsible had been that treatment would have been in the best interests of the child. It is first and foremost a matter of clinical judgment. I think that, however sad, that should be acknowledged. The other thing that should be said is that the whole House will want to wish the girl well in the treatment that she is undertaking today.

Mr. Prescott *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Madam Speaker: Order. That is a warm enough welcome.

Mr. Prescott: Can the Leader of the House confirm the leaks that are emerging from the Prime Minister's tour of the middle east that the Greenbury committee proposes to recommend absolutely nothing to curb the greed of the bosses in the privatised utilities?

Mr. Newton: What I can confirm is that the Prime Minister and, indeed, all my right hon. Friends have made it clear that they attach importance to the work of the Greenbury committee and that they will want to study its conclusions with care and then consider whether it would be appropriate to make any legislative change.

Mr. Prescott: Whatever the right hon. Gentleman may say, is not the Prime Minister's support for legislation against pay excesses a sham? Only yesterday the President of the Board of Trade once again defended boardroom greed. When will the Government realise that people in Britain want a fundamental shift so that power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many and not the few?

Mr. Newton: It sounds to me as though the right hon. Gentleman will need to undertake another rewrite of clause IV before the ink on this one is dry.

Mr. Wilshire: Last December, our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated that Ministers would not talk to Sinn Fein-IRA before huge amounts of weapons were surrendered. This morning, I received a letter from our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland stating that talks would take place with Sinn Fein-IRA before weapons were handed in. Which is current Government policy?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has indeed received a letter from my right hon. and learned Friend today. I have a copy of it before me. It makes it absolutely clear that, before Ministers will engage in talks in the way that Sinn Fein currently seeks, there must be a clear and reliable assurance from Sinn Fein that constructive discussion,

especially in achieving substantial progress on decommissioning arms, would be facilitated and accelerated by Ministers joining that dialogue. No such assurance has been received, and I think that what is being said and done is entirely consistent with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State have said before and, indeed, with what is sensible and practicable in seeking a way forward in Northern Ireland.

Q2. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Ms Eagle: On executive pay, will the Leader of the House admit that the public know that the Greenbury committee is a con, because it is full of the very fat cats who are earning millions of pounds, who are protecting their own pay and positions? Does he not realise that asking that bunch to legislate to curb excesses of executive pay is like asking Dracula to guard the blood bank?

Mr. Newton: The answers to the hon. Lady's questions are no, no and no, in that order.

Mr. Elletson: Would my right hon. Friend care to speculate on the possible reasons why the historic commitment to full employment, endorsed by generations of Labour party members, has now been abandoned by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)?

Mr. Newton: It is perhaps not for me to speculate about the causes of Opposition policy changes, but, if I were driven to do so, I would venture the opinion that the penny has finally dropped that their commitment to a minimum wage, a social chapter and a further renewal of trade union powers is incompatible with full employment.

Q3. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Callaghan: Will the Minister note that the former and the present Secretary of State for National Heritage have not replied to the Select Committee on National Heritage report, "Privacy and Media Intrusion"? As it is now exactly two years since the Select Committee presented its report, why have the Government have failed to respond to it? What is he afraid of, and will he apologise to the House for the delay?

Mr. Newton: I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage will seek to reply as soon as the very difficult issues involved have been thoroughly considered and studied.

Mrs. Lait: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) that the rewritten clause IV is 400 words of waffle—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have been very tolerant today, but I remind hon. Members that we holding the Executive to account for their policies, not for the policies or the activities of any other party. If the hon. Lady can rephrase that question, I will give her an opportunity to do so, but she must seek to bring the Government to account.

Mrs. Lait: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we were ever to have a clause IV, it would not contain 400 words of waffle?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that my hon. Friend's question was slightly lost in Opposition Members' baying. I am certainly aware that the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has described the new clause IV as 400 hundred words of waffle. It is absolutely clear that it takes us no nearer to what we really need: some clarification of Labour's policies.

Q4. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wilson: We can understand the reluctance of the Leader of the House to answer questions about executive pay and share options, so perhaps we can move the debate forward a little. Do the Government intend to devolve other areas of Government policy to sub-committees of millionaires appointed by the CBI? Will the recommendations of those committees be final and, if so, is that what is meant by the "smack of firm leadership" from the Government?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I have shown any reluctance to answer the questions—it is just that Opposition Members do not like my answers. As the main thrust of the question refers to a matter that is principally for shareholders to decide, it seems entirely correct to consult and to take the views of such a committee.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the news that prizes from the national lottery now amount to almost £500 million? Is it not excellent news that a substantial amount of money has been allocated to the good causes supported by the lottery?

Mr. Newton: Indeed it is very good news. The national lottery is certainly giving pleasure to many people and it is yielding both large prizes for the winners and large amounts of additional money for the arts, sport, heritage, charities and the Millennium Commission. It has been a huge success, which is very much to the credit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and I think that that success will continue and will grow.

Q5. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fisher: On executive pay, will the Leader of the House answer the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and explain what the Government intend to do about it? What sort of Prime Minister says that he finds something distasteful but then says that he does not have the first

idea of what he wants to do about it and simply leaves it to the CBI to tell him what Government policy should be? What sort of Government do that?

Mr. Newton: What the Government are going to do is what I have said at least twice this afternoon and what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said on many other occasions: we will study the recommendations of the Greenbury committee with care and we will then decide what action to take, including the possibility of legislation if that seems appropriate.

Mr. Couchman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that President Clinton's decision to meet Mr. Adams on Thursday and to allow Mr. Adams to raise funds on behalf of Sinn Fein-IRA is a grave blow to the United States' special relationship with this country, and indeed to the cherished links with the Republic of Ireland and the majority of the Irish people who are opposed to Mr. Adams's violence and terrorism?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made his views very clear to the President. The United States Administration are in no doubt about our views. I hope that everyone will now acknowledge that it is important to maintain pressure on Sinn Fein from all sides to engage in substantive constructive discussions along the lines that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has indicated. I hope that the need for Mr. Adams to engage in such constructive and substantive discussions will be emphasised firmly and vigorously in any meetings with the United States Administration.

Q6. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. MacShane: In view of the fact that most independent jurists do not consider the courts of Singapore to be independent of the Executive and in view of the desire for a full judicial spotlight on the Barings affair in London, will the Leader of the House assure us that every effort is being made to extradite Mr. Nick Leeson from Germany so that he can stand trial in London?

Mr. Newton: The House will understand that I do not think it right to get drawn into commenting from the Dispatch Box on the legal position in other Commonwealth countries. The Government are determined to make every effort to ensure that the Barings events are properly and thoroughly investigated and that appropriate action is taken in the appropriate courts.

Q7. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Atkinson: Is my right hon. Friend aware of a letter of appreciation that I recently received from an Anglican clergyman in my constituency, who does not often support the Government's policies but who greatly appreciates the education that his daughter has received as a result of the assisted places scheme? He knows of many other low-income families in his parish whose children have benefited in the same way. How shall I respond to my constituent's request to learn whether the assisted places scheme has a future and whether it is safe?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right that not only his constituent but many thousands of other parents throughout the country welcome the assisted places scheme, which has provided an excellent education in independent schools to many able pupils from low-income families. It has been outstandingly successful. The assurance I can give my hon. Friend and his constituent is that the assisted places scheme is safe under us. It is certainly not safe under the Opposition.

Madam Speaker's Statement

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make. I must acquaint the House with the fact that I have received the following letter from Sir Alan Urwick, the Serjeant at Arms.

"I am writing to confirm to you my decision to retire on 31 July 1995 shortly after my 65th birthday. Following 37 years in the Diplomatic Service, I have been uniquely privileged to spend a further 6 years in the service of the House of Commons. It has been a period of far-reaching change, as the House has taken control of its own administration and finance and also embarked on the rapid expansion of the accommodation available for Members and their staff. I owe a very great debt of gratitude to all who work in the Serjeant at Arms' Department, including the Parliamentary Works Directorate, without whom none of the achievements of these years would have been possible. I would also wish to pay special tribute to the Metropolitan Police, on whom we rely so heavily for the safety of these buildings and of all those who work here.

Finally I wish to record my deep appreciation of the kindness and consideration shown to me by all Members of the House which have made my tour of duty such a happy and rewarding one."

There will be an occasion later to pay formal tributes. Meanwhile, consultations on the recommendation for a successor to Sir Alan Urwick are taking place through the House of Commons Commission.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has there been any request from the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the House this afternoon to make a statement about the Transport Research Laboratory? A written question is being put into the Library of the House at this moment, the contents of which are not known to me, but it concerns a highly important and quite unique research facility which has contributed over many years to the protection of many of our citizens, and if it is to be privatised or abandoned without the House getting the chance to debate it, it will be a crying and unacceptable shame.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Lady is aware, provided that an announcement is made to the House, it is for the Minister concerned to determine the method of that announcement, and I have not been informed by any Minister that the Government are seeking to make a statement on the matter raised by the hon. Lady.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During Question Time, the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) accused my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) of sitting on his fat backside. Given the implication that there is something superior about having a thin backside, is that not so politically incorrect as to constitute unparliamentary language?

Madam Speaker: The entire House knows what I feel about the custom of our exchanges. I have cautioned Members on this from time to time, but I get weary of repeating my views. All hon. Members know that good language is the essence of our exchanges here.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could you advise me whether the Secretary of State for the Environment has requested to make a statement to the House about the astonishing cuts in the environmental protection budget published yesterday—£16 million next year and then £32 million? In view of the constant statements to the House and our Select Committee about increasing concern for air pollution and the environment, it would be proper for him to explain that matter to the House.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order but a question about next week's business, which the hon. Lady might put to the Leader of the House. In case any other hon. Members wish to ask me whether a Minister will give a statement today, let me tell them that the answer is no. If a statement were to be made, it would be shown on the Annunciator.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Do not the workings of the House and its reputation outside depend to a large measure on the assumption of personal trustworthiness and honour between hon. Members? Were not those principles seriously threatened yesterday when one hon. Member appeared to have purloined papers belonging to another and read extracts from them to the House? Will you launch an investigation into the matter or assure us

that it will not happen again? If not, none of us will ever be able to assume the security of our papers, briefcases or offices in future.

Madam Speaker: I am not aware of the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. If such a case occurs, it is as well to come directly to my office rather than wait a day and raise it on the Floor of the House. My office is always open; I live here, work 16 hours a day and am always willing to see hon. Members about any issue as serious as that.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand that the Secretary of State for Education would like to make a statement on nursery education expansion, but I am told that the Prime Minister wants a different statement—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Column 583 of yesterday's *Hansard* shows that an hon. Member admitted to handling the stolen property of a Minister of the Crown. It is an incredible state of affairs in which an hon. Member stole papers from a civil servant, admitted that he did so and then used the papers in a debate.

Madam Speaker: I have no knowledge of the case that the hon. Gentleman raises with me. The copy of *Hansard* has just been passed to me. I shall look immediately at the matter as soon as I leave the Chair.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that, yesterday, the chief executive of the Student Loans Company was sacked because of financial irregularities in that company which have caused students great hardship. That is in direct contravention to evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee two years ago and I feel that the House has been misled. May we have that matter brought to the Floor of the House?

Madam Speaker: This is a matter for the Leader of the House and the Opposition through the usual channels. I am sure that hon. Members who came in at the last election are well aware of how the usual channels in the House operate. I advise the hon. Gentleman to raise the matter with the shadow Leader in the first place so that arrangements might be made with the Government for such business to take place.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Further to the point of order on column 583—

Madam Speaker: Order. There is no point of order. I need to carry out a thorough investigation into this matter before I can do anything about it.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may recall that, some time ago, I asked you whether oral statements could be made following important meetings overseas so that Ministers would be directly accountable to the House. Last week, the world summit on social development was held in Copenhagen and a statement has been made by means of written answer No. 122 to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney). It is a matter of great importance to this country and the third world. Will you take the opportunity to talk to Ministers to get those statements made orally to the House instead of being hidden away in written answers?

Madam Speaker: I dislike repeating myself and taking up the time of the House, but I shall do so and inform the hon. Gentleman and the House that, provided that an announcement is made to the House, it is up to the Minister making that announcement to determine whether it is done by written answer or oral statement. I have no authority in such matters.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am not sure whether this matter has been drawn to your attention, but this morning there appeared to be some rather loud activity on the Thames, in close proximity to the Terrace wall. I have the honour and privilege to be chairing the Standing Committee that is considering the Finance Bill, and the proceedings of our Committee were inconvenienced. Indeed, Members raised points of order with me to say that they could not hear what was going on because of the activity of speedboats and, apparently, water-skiers, in close proximity to the Terrace wall. Not only because of the inconvenience to the Committee's sitting but because of the security of this place, I wonder whether you had been told about it, and if not whether you will investigate it.

Madam Speaker: I shall certainly investigate it. The hon. Gentleman knows where Speaker's House is. I had all the windows open on this beautiful morning, and I thought that it was a wonderful sight to see those speedboats on the Thames; in fact, I was rather envious. I thought that I should have been in one of them—but not on the skis. However, if the hon. Gentleman feels that it was damaging to the fabric of this building, I will examine the suggestion that they may have been too close to the wall.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It was Tony Blair walking on water.

Madam Speaker: I thought that the hon. Member for Bolsover was the only one who could do that.

Civil Aviation (Air Transport Licences) Amendment

3.40 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the publication to local planning authorities by the Civil Aviation Authority of the receipt of applications for the grant, revocation, suspension or variation of air transport licences and of any decision made by the Civil Aviation Authority in relation thereto.

My interest in the area arises indirectly from events in my constituency that led to a public inquiry into the proposals by British Aerospace plc to turn an airstrip into a full commercial airport, but I am not here today to debate those particular matters, which await a decision jointly by the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment.

In preparing the evidence that I gave to the public inquiry, it transpired that the company concerned had perfectly legally and properly been applying to the CAA for various licences to operate an airport since 11 October 1988, but the first opportunity that any member of the public had to learn of those proposals was not until 5 February 1993, when the company announced that it had obtained various licences. My objection to the procedure is not that the company was doing what it considered proper for its own business but that the whole procedure of discussion and documentation of activities, which might conceivably have a great bearing on the lives and environment of my constituents, was going on in entire secrecy.

It transpired, when I investigated the matter, that the only requirement on the CAA—it is, of course, an agency set up by Government—in connection with the publication of any grant revocation, suspension or variation of an air transport licence, is to publish the granting of the licence in a number of highly obscure publications, which are, by and large, received only by airlines and others who are directly connected with the operation of civil aviation. I do not believe that that is sufficient and my Bill therefore proposes one modest additional requirement on the CAA, on any occasion when a licence is granted, revoked, suspended or, indeed, applied for—that it should notify the local planning authority of the area in which the airfield or site of the proposed activity is situated, so that the local planning authority can decide what, if anything, it needs to do to publicise the application that it has received or granted.

Such a measure would not involve any public sector cost, but would involve notifying earlier the people who would be intimately affected by any proposed airport operations, to consider what effect those operations would have on their lives, their environment and their property, and if necessary to make representations to the CAA on that matter.

At the moment there is no such requirement to publish and, in allowing such a situation to continue, the Government are not fulfilling the requirement that they have set out on many occasions that our society should become more open. My constituents should be able to comment on any decisions taken behind closed doors in the privacy of the Civil Aviation Authority which affect or can affect their lives.

This modest measure will create more openness in the work of the Civil Aviation Authority without any detriment to its operations because it will be up to the local planning authority to decide how much publicity to give to the information that it receives.

The measure would be a modest step towards replacing the secrecy or opacity of the Civil Aviation Authority with rather more public scrutiny of the important operations that it conducts on behalf of the Government. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Michael Stern, Sir Geoffrey Pattie, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. Phil Gallie, Mr. David Wilshire, Mr. Stephen Day and Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva.

CIVIL AVIATION (AIR TRANSPORT LICENCES) AMENDMENT

Mr. Michael Stern accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the publication to local planning authorities by the Civil Aviation Authority of the receipt of applications for the grant, revocation, suspension or variation of air transport licences and of any decision made by the Civil Aviation Authority in relation thereto: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 July, and to be printed. [Bill 80.]

Atomic Energy Authority Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.46 pm

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill will enable the privatisation of the commercial activities of the Atomic Energy Authority known as AEA Technology. It is designed to permit the sale of AEA Technology, but it is not designed to lead to nuclear privatisation. AEA Technology is not a nuclear operator. The Bill will not take any nuclear facilities into the private sector. It will allow AEA Technology to realise its full potential and it will enhance overall United Kingdom competitiveness. It will provide staff with new opportunities and new horizons.

It may help the House if I explain something of the background. AEA Technology is an operating division of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. The authority started life in the 1950s as a nuclear research and development organisation. In those days, the authority was the UK nuclear industry. It designed and operated the first nuclear power stations in the country. It manufactured and reprocessed fuel. It undertook a wide range of nuclear activities. But it was primarily a research organisation. As the nuclear programme developed, it became the practice to transfer out functions which could be run commercially.

For example, fuel manufacture was transferred out to the company which subsequently became British Nuclear Fuels plc. Radioisotope production was transferred out to what is now Amersham International. Amersham has been successfully privatised. Both it and BNFL have become successful companies in their own right.

In the 1960s, it became clear that nuclear research was producing ideas and technologies which could be applied in non-nuclear fields.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Before the Minister moves away from the history of some of the changes, will he outline the structural differences between companies such as Amersham International, particularly in the context of employee rights that exist post-privatisation?

Mr. Eggar: I shall address some of those issues, particularly pensions, which I think that the hon. Gentleman had in mind. I understand that the overwhelming majority of Amersham International employees have now voluntarily left the state pension scheme and have opted into the company pension scheme. I shall return to that issue and if the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene again, I shall gladly extend the debate.

In 1965, the authority was authorised to begin work on non-nuclear research and development. From the outset, non-nuclear work was done on a commercial basis. The importance of that work has grown steadily since then.

In the past decade or so, nuclear technology has become a mature technology. New power stations world wide are being ordered at a slower rate, if at all; the pace of work on new reactor designs has slowed. Demand for the authority's traditional nuclear research and development services has declined with the decline in the overall activity of the nuclear generating side. The authority has therefore had to place ever-increasing emphasis on the growing non-nuclear business.

In 1986, an important change occurred. The Atomic Energy Authority Act 1986 put the organisation on to a trading fund basis. From then on it was no longer Vote-funded, but was expected to secure all its income from contracts with customers. Since then the focus has been on how to assure the authority's commercial performance. The Bill now builds on the progress that was made as a result of those changes.

The authority is now smaller than it was in the 1960s, but it remains a substantial organisation, employing more than 7,000 staff at six main UK sites. The largest is at Harwell in Oxfordshire: it has more than 2,300 authority staff. Harwell concentrates mainly on research and development. Culham is nearby in the same county; that site was originally developed for the UK fusion programme, and is host to the joint European Torus project. Fusion still accounts for the work of a significant proportion of the existing work force, but the site is now much more diversified. Last April it became the headquarters of the National Environmental Technology Centre, one of the world's leading centres of environmental expertise. About 900 authority staff work on the Culham site.

Risley is near Warrington. It consists mainly of office and laboratory buildings, and has no nuclear facilities. About 1,000 staff work there. Dounreay, near Thurso in Caithness, was the site for the development of experimental fast reactors. The main task there now is the decommissioning of the site's closed reactors. Dounreay has about 1,000 authority staff. Winfrith in Dorset was the site for several prototype reactors, most of which have now been shut down. About 900 staff work there. Windscale is an enclave within the BNFL site at Sellafield, and has about 400 staff.

Let me say a little more about why we are introducing the Bill. In recent years, a great deal of thought has been given to the question of the authority's future. In 1992, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission reviewed the services that it provided; it concluded that the authority's business activities rested uneasily in the public sector, and should be removed from it as far as practicable.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): On a rough count, the word "liability" is used 75 times in the Bill. The biggest Atomic Energy Authority liability relates to nuclear waste and radioactive contamination. Do the Government think it fair to sell off the profitable parts of the authority, on the basis of its high-tech engineering and environmental expertise, while leaving the taxpayer with the bill for cleaning up the nuclear waste left behind?

Mr. Eggar: Liability for the treatment of nuclear waste rests, of course, with the Government. The Bill makes no difference to that. Liability rests with Government division of AEA Technology, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. It is the view and the experience of Government Division that an increasing arms length relationship with the various companies—including AEA Technology—that have the necessary expertise to deal with liabilities is the best way forward.

The latest estimate is that, in, I think, the next three years, the move towards an increasing arms length contractual relationship with companies that undertake decommissioning work will lead to a significant saving of

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public money of about £50 million. Liabilities rest with the Government, but they must do everything possible to ensure that those liabilities are managed not only safely, in accordance with the necessary conditions that are laid down, but cost effectively, from the point of view of doing the utmost to safeguard taxpayers' money.

In 1993, we asked Barclays de Zoete Wedd to consider the scope for privatisation. It advised us that the great majority of AEA's irradiated facilities should remain publicly owned—they should remain in what is now AEA Government division. But it also said that certain commercial activities were capable of being and should be privatised.

In September 1993, the authority's management announced a structural reorganisation, which reflected the themes emerging from the review work. Three separate divisions would result. UKAEA Government division would be responsible for managing UKAEA's sites and its nuclear liabilities. Commercial division, now known as AEA Technology, would take over the authority's commercial activities. The new services division would cover facilities management services.

The authority saw the creation of the services division as a temporary phase. Facilities services did not represent a core part of its business. It believed that those services could be offered more cheaply and efficiently by outside contractors. Agreement has been reached in principle for the sale of facilities services division. The intended buyer—Procord Ltd.—is a leading facilities management company. Its core business is facilities management. Its purchase of FSD will improve quality of service for FSD's customers. It will also create new career opportunities for current employees because they will be part of a much larger organisation that—this is important for their future—is committed to growing the facilities service operation. It is a good deal for all concerned, not least the taxpayer.

In my reply on 17 February 1994 to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), I said that ownership of and responsibility for the safe management of AEA's nuclear liabilities, as well as certain other functions more appropriate to Government, would remain in the public sector. I can now confirm that those liabilities and other functions will remain with UKAEA Government division, which will remain in the public sector.

Government division's mission is to manage down the cost of the nuclear liabilities, consistent always with the health, safety and environmental requirements that are laid down. I want to underline and emphasise the importance of safety. Safety is and will remain the highest priority both for the Government and for all those involved in the nuclear industry.

The nuclear site licences at AEA sites will continue to be held by UKAEA Government division. It will, therefore, retain ultimate responsibility for safety at all UKAEA sites. Where AEA Technology operates from those sites, it will have to comply with UKAEA safety requirements. Privatisation will not compromise safety in any way.

Government division's focus on liabilities management has already achieved significant savings. Further savings will flow from increased competition and the injection of private sector expertise.

Government division announced yesterday that it has decided to appoint a site managing agent at Dounreay. That managing agency will consist of a management team seconded to Government division. Government division will retain ownership and overall control of the site. Government division will continue to be the site licence holder and will continue, therefore, to have full responsibility for safety.

Dounreay staff currently in Government division will continue to be UKAEA employees. They will not—I repeat not—become the employees of the managing agent. That arrangement will provide additional project management and commercial expertise. It will ensure that decommissioning and environmental restoration work at Dounreay is carried out effectively. It will also help in future development of the site, including the exploitation of non-nuclear opportunities.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): This arrangement transfers practical managerial responsibility from managers who have been part of Government division to a firm or group of individuals who are apparently to be employed as a result of outside tendering. Does not that make somewhat fictional this concept of the responsibility for safety remaining with Government division?

Mr. Eggar: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern and the importance of Dounreay to the economy in Thurso and all the far north of Scotland. Obviously, Government division has considered the matter carefully. It will not compromise safety in any way. The division recognises that the nuclear site licence rests with it and that ultimate responsibility for the site and for safety matters must continue to lie with the director of the site, as it does at present. The hon. Gentleman recognises that there is, at present, a need to look at Dounreay's role and, in particular, at the opportunities for other work that might come in as a result of the well-known and understandable rundown—although it is a gradual rundown—in the level of activity there.

Government division has come to the view that it does not currently have the expertise necessary to act as managing agent and, therefore, to look at diversification opportunities. It feels that the best way to obtain that expertise is to appoint a managing agent that will bring with it the necessary mix of skills, but remembering always that the managing agent answers to Government division and the director.

Mr. Maclennan *rose—*

Mr. Eggar: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes, but I am sure that he will make a contribution later in the debate. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Industry and Energy will be able to take up his point.

Mr. Maclennan: I will not trouble the Minister again, but I hope to come back to some of the points later if I succeed in catching Madam Speaker's eye.

It is important to have the Minister's answer on this point. My question related to the responsibility for safety. The Minister said that that lies with Government division and the director of the site. It appears that that responsibility is effectively being transferred to managers who are being brought in as part of a site management agency team and that the practical work involving safety

and the environment, which is crucial to the success of the establishment, is passing away from those who have experience of managing the site safely and in an environmentally non-hazardous way. It is true that, ultimately, the Minister is responsible for safety at the site and I would have thought that he would be unhappy to see such sensitive matters pass from those engaged in the nuclear industry to those whose objectives, even from his own description, are apparently quite different.

Mr. Eggar: This is a sensitive matter to which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy and I have given considerable thought. Clearly, safety is paramount. It cannot be compromised in any way. If Government division were proposing an outside contractor coming in to take over all management responsibility for the site and, therefore, inevitably taking on the safety role, I would understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns and, frankly, I would express them. I am quite satisfied, however, that it will be possible to enable the managing agent to manage the site and bring his company's particular expertise to what is needed to be done, while ensuring that safety standards are maintained. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that if the Government come to the conclusion that that is not happening, we will revert immediately to the holder of the nuclear site licence—Government Division—and satisfy ourselves that the necessary safeguards are in place.

We have looked at the matter in considerable detail because, whatever our political views, we cannot afford to compromise the very high safety standards which have been a feature of the AEA. I would not do anything that in any way imperilled those standards. The system works and I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider it carefully and explore the implications in full detail. I hope that over the coming months before the managing agents are appointed—I understand that it is likely to be around October—he will have found that his concerns have been met.

Let me now turn to describe AEA Technology. AEA Technology is the trading name, as I have said, for the authority's commercial activities. It is an international science and engineering services business, it employs some 4,000 people and has a turnover of £250 million. AEA Technology is represented on all six of the authority's sites, but the largest concentration of staff is at Harwell. Some 1,700 of the total 2,300 employees there work for AEA technology, but, as hon. Members will know, considerable numbers of staff also work at Risley, Culham and Winfrith.

AEA Technology serves a wide range of markets in, for example, manufacturing, transport, oil and gas, defence energy supply, chemicals and health care. It operates in four closely related areas: plant and process performance optimisation, product improvement, safety and risk management and environmental and waste management. Its business, in short, is identifying problems and finding solutions based on the know-how that has been built up over the past 40 years, during which it has been involved in leading-edge science and engineering.

Some 40 per cent. of AEA Technology's business now comes from Government and a further 18 per cent. from the UK public sector. In volume terms, however, the UK domestic Government markets are of diminishing importance.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does my right hon. Friend intend to say anything about the nuclear review? Many of my constituents are worried that the whole privatisation is a sell-off of the liabilities of the nuclear industry and that the Government may believe that there are no future nuclear requirements. I and many of my hon. Friends believe that there is a great future for the nuclear industry. We would like to hear from the Government that the nuclear review will be published and that the results will be available to us before any sell-off. I hope that Labour Members will tell us what the Labour party will do to assure the future of the nuclear industry.

Mr. Eggar: I recognise the concern about the issue felt by my hon. Friend and by his constituents. He raises a number of different strands and I shall address them in turn. His first point relates to liabilities. AEA's liabilities have been calculated to be in the range of £8 billion, on a discounted basis, in a range from £6 billion to £12 billion depending on a number of assumptions. Those liabilities remain with the Government division and, therefore, with the Government.

The question that a number of people are getting at is how the nuclear review, when it is completed, is likely to affect the demand for the nuclear services that AEA Technology can provide. An assumption seems to have developed that if the nuclear review decided that new nuclear stations should be built, that would automatically be good news for AEA Technology. The reality is that almost whatever the decisions of the nuclear review, considerable work is likely to be available to AEA Technology, if it competes effectively for it.

AEA Technology has more expertise than any other entity in the world in the older nuclear stations because the Magnox stations were the first commercial stations in the world. Naturally, the issue of decommissioning and the issues raised towards the end of a station's life have been faced first by the United Kingdom. AEA Technology has undoubtedly developed considerable expertise in those matters. Regardless of whether the nuclear review comes up with a decision to build new nuclear stations or not, there will be a continuing work load. Any decisions taken on the future of the Magnox stations may have a bearing on the work load, although issues relating to the life of the Magnox stations will, of course, be essentially a matter for the nuclear installations inspectorate rather than for the nuclear review.

All that is a rather long way in which to say to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) that at the moment, I cannot tell him when the nuclear review will be published—

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): In the fullness of time.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman says that it will be published in the fullness of time. I am much blunter than that. I have made a number of predictions previously on the timing of issues related to the nuclear review and I have never yet been right. This time, I shall not give any idea of the timing of the publication of the nuclear review because that would be tempting fate and my fate is already too near for me to risk any further estimates.

The concern of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset is noted. It will take some time for the Bill to go through the House. It is only an enabling measure for

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privatisation. It is unlikely—I go no further than that—that full privatisation will take place before we have had some idea of the outcome of the nuclear review.

Mr. Miller: Before the Minister leaves that issue, does he not think that, given the quite proper overlap between some of the work undertaken by AEA and by Berkeley technology centre, which I know that he has visited, it would be better to hold back the Bill until after the nuclear review, so that we can properly determine, in a rational debate covering the whole spectrum, which issues should fall into which camp?

Mr. Eggar: The short answer is no, it would not. But since the House seems to want long answers, I shall expand somewhat on that.

Clearly, if we were talking about a direct relationship between the management of AEA's nuclear liabilities and the nuclear review—which we are not—there would be a case for linkage. But of course the Bill has nothing to do with the liabilities; they are clearly put on one side. The Bill is about AEA's commercial activities, and we must remember that roughly 50 per cent. of all AEAT's present activities are not nuclear related. Everybody agrees that the future of AEA rests with a determination to expand and to compete effectively in the non-nuclear aspects of its activities.

That is nothing new. I pay tribute to the 1965 Labour Government—

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister repeat that, please?

Mr. Eggar: I am talking about 1965. The Labour Government recognised at that stage that there had to be some diversification away from the core nuclear business into non-nuclear business. That has been a continuing trend, and no serious commentator who knows and is involved with AEAT fails to recognise that its future lies in developing the extraordinary expertise that it has accumulated over the past 40 years and reorienting that to more commercial activities.

One of the more interesting aspects of my connection with AEA over the past two or three years has been the extent to which other United Kingdom companies have not recognised the full extent of its expertise, and the way in which those that have worked with AEAT have been excited by the level of that expertise and the opportunities that have arisen as a result of joint ventures of one kind or another. That is not merely a domestic United Kingdom view; several interesting joint ventures have taken place between Japanese companies and AEAT, and the company has a good reputation throughout the world in the nuclear sphere, too.

That is where the emphasis should lie. However neat and tidy it may seem, it would not be in the interests of AEAT, nor even relevant to the nuclear review, to delay the Bill and wait for the results of that review.

As I said, AEA's growth markets are the United Kingdom private sector and the overseas market, also largely private sector. The United Kingdom private sector already accounts for 18 per cent. of its turnover and overseas markets for 23 per cent. Both those markets are expected to grow this year by no less than 40 per cent., and further substantial growth is expected next year. Privatisation will of course provide further impetus for that process.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I hope that while my right hon. Friend is talking about the figures, he will say something about AEA's projected profit of £10 million for this year. I understand that the figures for next year look even better. It is important to re-emphasise the great success and the tremendous potential of the organisation.

Mr. Eggar: The figures mentioned by my hon. Friend are right, and there is no doubt that AEA Technology has come a long way during the past few years and that it has built on the trading fund status that it was given by the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1986. There is a lot of potential out there for additional work, but the work is highly competitive. There is no area in which AEA Technology has an absolute worldwide monopoly. In most sectors, it has competitors within the UK and elsewhere in the world, and it is very much a worldwide business.

AEA Technology will thrive if it can bring to bear the expertise that it has established from the tremendous residual effect of 40 years of high-class science engineering and apply that in a more rigorous way to the commercial opportunities that exist. I re-emphasise to my hon. Friend that the future lies predominantly in the expansion of non-nuclear, rather than nuclear, business.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): Is the Minister aware that the improvements in AEA Technology's profitability in the past 12 months have been borne on the back of 400 redundancies—some 10 per cent. of the work force? Will he assure us that after privatisation—when the terms and conditions of employees in the current company will be divested—the employees will have their incomes, pensions and entitlement to redundancy payments protected, and that they will get more than just the minimum amounts offered with regard to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations?

Mr. Eggar: I shall address those issues later in what is already quite a long speech, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. I have been involved in a number of privatisations and I can say as a matter of principle that the Government seek to protect the rights of public sector employees who move to the private sector. We shall certainly do everything we can in terms of TUPE and with regard to pensions, to make sure that a fair and just arrangement is reached. I shall refer at a later stage to those matters, and I shall willingly give way again to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes.

AEA Technology has profited by its experience and expertise in the nuclear field. It has won significant contracts for work at Chernobyl. AEA Technology scientists are currently working on plans for the decommissioning of Chernobyl units 1, 2 and 3. AEA Technology is also a leading member of an international consortium carrying out a feasibility study for a new shelter over unit 4.

Other significant export contracts include a study for the European Commission on the safety of Chernobyl-type RBMK reactors in the former Soviet Union. AEA Technology is also involved in work to clean up the Maralinga test site in Australia.

AEA Technology has successfully exploited its nuclear-derived skills in non-nuclear markets. That has involved, for example, the development of non-destructive testing techniques using X-rays and ultrasonics.

AEA Technology developed the original robot used by bomb disposal teams in Northern Ireland. It developed power fluidics, which permits the design of pumps, mixer valves and precipitators without moving parts. That technology has particular advantages in industries such as pharmaceuticals and fine chemicals that involve the production and handling of delicate preparations with minimal damage.

AEA Technology scientists have used their skills in the development of advanced battery technology. Their lithium-ion cathode technology is now being sold to battery manufacturers throughout the world. In health care, AEA Technology has developed a unique three-dimensional laparoscope. That piece of equipment enables a conventional endoscope to give a 3-D picture. It offers major advances for keyhole surgery.

AEA Technology is currently developing a carbon fibre hip implant. It uses filament winding techniques originally used in the aerospace industry. The new implant will be less rigid than currently available metal implants. It will reduce the need for patients to return for second or third operations.

AEA Technology's safety skills have found a significant market in the North sea. Its experts assist operators by producing safety cases for offshore installations. It is a leading safety consultancy in the North sea.

AEA Technology also helped in the search for the causes of the King's Cross fire. Software developed by AEA was used to simulate the spread of fire up the escalator. The model was subsequently validated in scale-model trials at the fire research station. That input helped in the understanding of how the disaster happened. The same technology is now being used to ensure that new underground stations and tunnels are designed to minimise the risk of a similar accident.

AEA Technology's National Environmental Technology Centre was formed last summer by the merger of its environmental operations with those of the Warren Spring laboratory. The centre carries out a vast range of environmental consultancy work. It helps customers meet increasingly demanding environmental standards.

The centre also runs the national air pollution monitoring network for the Department of the Environment, and the National Chemical Emergency Centre, which is on duty 24 hours a day. It helps to sort out chemical accidents throughout the world.

Let me now explain our plans for the future of AEA Technology. In my statement of 17 February 1994, I announced my intention to privatise AEA Technology. I explained that decisions on the form of privatisation would be based on AEA Technology's performance in the marketplace and on the extent to which the various options met customer requirements, enhanced competition, helped to improve UK competitiveness, and maximised the return to the taxpayer.

The chairman of the authority and senior management of AEA Technology have made it clear that, in their view, those criteria would best be satisfied by selling the business as a single whole. Employee representatives have also made it clear that they would wish to see the business kept together as far as possible. I naturally attach a great deal of weight to the views of management and staff. They are the people who know the business and whose commitment is crucial to realising its potential.

The immediate task for management must be to drive forward the commercial development of the business. It must continue the process of focusing the business on its core activities. A good deal has already been achieved in that direction, but there is more to be done. Management recognise that and is committed to the task of carrying it through.

The range of AEA Technology's activities will no doubt continue to change as the business develops.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): Does the Minister think that there is anything strange in those in the management of a public sector concern wishing to go private, particularly in view of the examples of their predecessors in the public sector getting their noses in the trough in terms of share options and six-figure salaries?

Mr. Eggar: I am sorry that, in a sensible, serious debate about the way forward for AEA Technology and how to ensure that that excellent group of people has a prosperous future, the hon. Gentleman should lower the tone in that way. I will not indulge in party political spats of that nature. If the hon. Gentleman wants to lower the tone, that is entirely up to him. In every aspect of its business, AEA Technology is fully competitive. It has competitors in all aspects. Therefore, it has to keep tight control of its costs. It is inevitable that salary costs at all levels in the organisation will be a major factor in its ability to obtain business. What is more, the Government, as vendors of AEA Technology, whether directly or indirectly under the provisions of the Bill, will make sure that the best possible practice is followed and will take account of any Greenbury recommendations, whether or not those recommendations have by that time found their way into legislation, because that has been felt appropriate.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I am following with close attention what my right hon. Friend says about the issue of unitary privatisation, because that is probably the critical issue. He talks about the core business of AEA Technology. What is the core business of a research organisation with a great range of customers, with synergies that run across a variety of activities? I warn my right hon. Friend to be very cautious when using the concept of a core business.

Mr. Eggar: It is for management to decide where its focus should be. The implication of what my hon. Friend has said is that whatever AEA Technology does now is automatically the core business for ever.

Mr. Jackson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Eggar: I see that my hon. Friend disagrees with my assessment of what he said. I think that he fully understands that, because it is a human skills business, because it is a business that will have to pursue the various scientific and engineering opportunities and other consultancy opportunities that are out there, because those opportunities are global and because they vary from time to time and from region to region, it will have to follow

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the opportunities. The core is likely to change over time, therefore, but I think that it is undoubted and uncontroverted that the management will need to concentrate on specific aspects.

Mr. Jackson: I thank my right hon. Friend. I notice that in his answer, which I think was correct except that he made the wrong deduction from my remark, he emphasises the role of the management in deciding what constitutes the core business. I agree with him, and I very much hope that he will give great weight to the opinions of the management in deciding what the structure of the company is to be, whether it will be fragmented and what the core business will be, so that the management will not find itself overruled by the Department, as it might be.

Mr. Eggar: We attach a great deal of importance to the attitude of management and, when the time comes for us to decide on privatisation and the structure of privatisation, we shall of course pay attention to the opinions of management. However, as the owner, as the Government protecting the rights of the taxpayers, we must also take account of other considerations.

As I said in response to an intervention, the range of AEA Technology's activities will no doubt continue to change as the business develops.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Mr. Eggar: Will my hon. Friend allow me to complete this? It is a rather important part of my speech, and I want it on the record.

Mr. Miller: The civil servants do.

Mr. Eggar: I would not want to say that. At least the hon. Gentleman does not have a copy today of what they wrote.

The range of AEA Technology's activities will no doubt continue to change as the business develops. It is inherent in the nature of a high-tech business such as AEA Technology that over time it should move out of some areas and into new ones, but, consistent with that, the Government agree that AEA Technology should continue to be managed as a single, integrated whole, focused on the goal of building an increasingly competitive and successful international business.

However, final decisions about the form of privatisation must depend on AEA Technology's performance in the months ahead, on the needs and requirements of customers and on confirmation from the market that a unitary sale will secure best overall value for money for the taxpayer. Decisions about the method and timing of the sale can similarly be taken only in the light of market circumstances at the time.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the Minister for giving way. Further to the point made by Opposition Members, as AEA Technology's key resource is its people, does he consider that an element of employee ownership may be particularly appropriate in this case?

Mr. Eggar: A fundamental part of the Government's strategy is that when we move towards privatisation, we should seek to involve employees in one way or another. I added that caveat because we have not yet decided how we shall privatise the company—whether it will be by way of a flotation, a trade sale and so on.

I do not want to give a firm commitment about employee ownership at this stage. However, I attach a great deal of importance to it and the Government are committed to that strategy. I will be surprised if the final outcome does not involve an element of employee participation in the future success of the privatised entity.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I am sorry to trouble my right hon. Friend again, but I am sure that he will appreciate that this is an important matter, which concerns my constituency. He said that the Government want to keep their options open—although I welcome his comments about a single, integrated whole—and that we must review the position in the light of developments. Does he propose to return to the House to gain its approval of the Government's decisions on those points? I do not believe that the Bill makes provision for that and I wonder whether it should be included in the legislation.

Mr. Eggar: The Bill is an enabling Bill. It enables the Government to proceed to privatise AEA Technology—although, as I have indicated, not the rest of its activities. Given my hon. Friend's assiduity, I am sure that he will have the opportunity to call us to account using the various avenues that are open to him during the privatisation process.

My hon. Friend is absolutely correct: there is no process within the Bill by which the Government's decisions are automatically the subject of further debate in the House. Following the discussions that we have had over a number of years, I am well aware of my hon. Friend's close interest not just in this matter but in whether the sale should proceed on a unitary basis. The words that I used were chosen very carefully and I think that they will repay careful study by the staff of AEA Technology in his constituency and elsewhere.

Let me say something more about the Bill. It provides scheme-making powers that will facilitate the sale of AEA Technology. It consists, in the main, of standard privatisation provisions, adapted to the specific conditions of AEA Technology.

As I said, the Bill leaves open options as to how the privatisation may take place. It provides for the business to be sold as a whole or in parts. It provides for the sale or sales to be carried out by the authority or by the Secretary of State. It leaves open the possibility of more than one transfer, and for the transfers to be carried out on more than one date.

The Bill specifically excludes the transfer by scheme of freehold land subject to a nuclear site licence. It also excludes the transfer of the nuclear site licence itself. As I emphasised, it is not a nuclear privatisation.

The Bill provides for the financial structure and control of the successor companies after vesting and while they are publicly owned. We shall also bring forward tax provisions in due course. As is customary, they will provide for the tax neutrality of any transfer to successors. We propose to introduce those tax provisions by way of an amendment for consideration in Committee in the House.

Finally on pensions, powers are taken so that all employees transferred to a publicly owned successor company can remain in the authority's schemes until privatisation. The powers also permit us to allow new employees to join the schemes until privatisation. In order to maintain maximum flexibility, there might be a

publicly owned successor company and during that time employees would stay with public sector pension provision. In other words, the terms will be exactly the same as they are now.

When privatisation takes place, the Bill will place a statutory duty on the seller—us or the publicly owned company—to be satisfied that employees can join a pension scheme that is no less favourable than the authority's schemes. That means that the new scheme must offer benefits which are at least equivalent to the authority's schemes, although the mix of benefits may be different.

The duty reflects the Government's long-standing practice when public sector employees are transferred to the private sector, but we have set it out expressly in the Bill so that employees know exactly where they stand.

Mr. Miller: If the Minister is prepared to give that guarantee, why is he not prepared to give the same guarantees that were given to Amersham International at the time of its flotation? Would it not be more sensible in the interests of the employees and the employer to follow that course of action?

Mr. Eggar: The privatisation of Amersham International was 13 or 14 years ago. At the time, employees were offered the choice of staying in the existing scheme or joining a new scheme. I understand that since then, the vast majority of Amersham employees have opted for the new scheme. That shows that it is possible for the private sector to offer more than equivalent pension entitlements and pension schemes to those in the public sector. So that there is no misunderstanding, the rights that have been accumulated in the AEA public sector scheme will remain in place if the employees so wish.

On the question whether the new scheme that is provided by the purchaser is at least equivalent to the authority's schemes, that will be audited by the Government Actuary. In other words, we shall have the advice of the Government Actuary as to whether that undertaking is made. That assurance is coupled with the experience of privatisations over the past 10 or 12 years, when there have always been scare stories about pension entitlements, but when the final settlement has been recognised by all parties to be fair to the employees and to the contributors to the schemes. That seems to me to be the appropriate way forward.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Eggar: I shall be criticised for breaking the spirit of Jopling if I continue giving way, but I am always ready to oblige.

Mr. Miller: I am grateful to the Minister, but will he answer the question? If the Government believe in choice, why does he not give these particular employees the choice in these circumstances? Is there a single technical reason that he is hiding away from the House for denying those employees that particular choice?

Mr. Eggar: The way in which all privatisation pension issues have been tackled since the Amersham precedent is that new schemes have been provided for the employees who have left the public sector. The Government, having considered all the options, believe that that is the best way forward, subject to the absolute assurance that the new scheme must offer benefits that are at least equivalent to the existing authority's schemes, although the mix of those benefits may be different.

Employees are AEA Technology's greatest asset. Without the skills of its employees, AEA would be nothing. We have no intention of selling employees short, and I am sure that the House will welcome the statutory reassurance that we are proposing.

Privatisation has been one of the Government's greatest success stories because it encourages efficiency and improves competitiveness. Companies flourish when they are removed from state control. They perform better and they respond better to customers.

We believe that privatisation is the only way to enable AEA Technology to realise the full potential of its scientific and engineering activities. There are enormous opportunities in the market. A fully competitive AEA Technology would be well placed to exploit those issues to the benefit of its staff and the United Kingdom. The Bill provides the key to unlocking that potential and I commend it to the House.

4.44 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): In a long and at times interesting speech, the Minister has tried to persuade us to give the Bill a Second Reading. In our opinion, if the Bill ever reaches the Statute Book it could do great harm to one of the few enterprises of which the Department of Trade and Industry can still be proud. I therefore regret to inform the Minister that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I intend to vote against the Bill today, for the many reasons that I shall outline later in my speech.

The Bill is not the privatisation measure that the President of the Board of Trade really meant to bring before the House during this parliamentary Session. As was mentioned yesterday, that was meant to be the fate of the Post Office, but alas, he and the Minister have been unable to convince sufficient numbers of their colleagues of the sterling merits of that proposal—in other words, to persuade them to vote for political suicide—hence the inclusion of the present measure in the Queen's speech last November. How unfortunate for the President of the Board of Trade to be treated so badly by his party in the autumn of a distinguished career—

Mr. Mudie: Winter.

Dr. Moonie: No, winter implies that there is a spring.

I am more than a little surprised to see the President of the Board of Trade and the Minister of State still in their places after the debacle attendant on the sale of the electricity generating companies last week. So far, with indifferent success, they have managed to dodge the charge of double dealing levelled at them by my hon. Friends and outraged investors in the city. I fear, however, that they may have seen their last donation from Trafalgar House. They will find it rather more difficult to avoid the only alternative explanation, which is that they are grossly incompetent. Sadly, incompetence has never been grounds for dismissal or resignation in the Tory party. If it were, I suspect that the Conservative Benches would be even more sparsely occupied than they are today.

The Bill is unnecessary and ill timed and may well operate against the national interest. It will certainly be a great source of concern to many of the 4,000 employees of AEA Technology, whose jobs, pensions and terms and

[Dr. Moonie]

conditions of employment will be affected to their detriment. As the Minister has told us, the Bill is a paving measure allowing AEA management to set up a company or companies which can be sold off without further effective parliamentary scrutiny. In other words, Ministers are asking to us write them a blank cheque—so much for open Government.

Besides that point of principle, which alone would be reason enough to vote against Second Reading tonight, I have listed four areas of general concern in the Bill which Ministers would do well to heed as they epitomise the failure of Government over the past 15 years.

First, we believe that the Bill is ill timed. We are currently awaiting publication of the long overdue nuclear review. In addition to making proposals about present and future power generation, the review will be obliged to look at other elements in the nuclear equation such as BNFL, the future of the Government division of AEA, practical problems concerning decommissioning, storage and processing of nuclear waste, and the future of Dounreay which is of great concern to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan).

Many of the arguments advanced by the Minister on behalf of the sell-off could apply equally to any of those agencies and services, in some cases with greater justification. For example, BNFL has secured world-wide markets for its services, including the thermal oxide reprocessing plant.

I am sure that the Minister has noted an article in *The Independent on Sunday* this weekend under the heading, "Nuclear sell-off planned". It says:

"Plans for an urgent, whole-scale privatisation of Britain's nuclear industry are being drawn up in secret by the Treasury."

I presume that that is why the Minister knows nothing about them.

"They could lead to an attempt to sell off the controversial Thorp reprocessing plant.

"The plans, which would also transfer Britain's oldest and most dangerous nuclear power station to British Nuclear Fuels, are causing a row between Chancellor Kenneth Clarke and . . . the President of the Board of Trade, who argues that they will lose votes at the next general election.

Mr. Clarke wants to announce the sell-off before the Easter recess and is keen to realise the money to finance tax cuts."

AEA Technology forms part of a seamless organisation, which is why we feel that the Government would be well advised to wait until they see the outcome of their nuclear review before proceeding further. Many of the skills that have been placed in AEA Technology rather than the Government division by the present set-up are acutely relevant to the current and future well-being of nuclear technology. I quote from the recent publications list, which includes

"The Jet neutron emission profile monitor; Application and development of ion chromatography for the analysis of transition metal cations in the primary coolants of light water reactors"—

I understand what those are, even if nobody else except my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) does—

"An efficient 14-M-V neutron detector for use in mixed 2.5- and 14-MeV neutron beams".

Need I go on?

Mr. Eggar: Can the hon. Gentleman go on?

Dr. Moonie: I certainly can. I will continue:

"A guide to the measurement of environmental gamma radiation; Operational trials of single- and multi-element CR-39 dosemeters for the DIDO and PLUTO reactors at the Harwell Laboratory".

The list is endless, and shows that AEA Technology is involved in nuclear research. To attempt at this stage, before we have the slightest sniff of what the nuclear review will include, is plain daft.

The division of AEA into so-called "nuclear and non-nuclear agencies" may have the merit of simplicity—always a key point for Ministers—but it lacks any valid justification. The suggestion that the Government division should be restricted eventually to a glorified purchasing agency for largely private decommissioning companies is justifiable only to a Government who have no intention of allowing it to operate profitably in the public sector even though it, too, could easily be a highly succesful operation. The Government division's decommissioning liabilities are the responsibility of the Government, who must provide the necessary resources for an effective programme, but at least some of the costs could be offset by allowing AEA to remain a joint agency covering both nuclear and non-nuclear work, selling its services on a world market which is increasingly desperate for quality of the kind that we can best provide. Why change things now, before those issues have been given proper consideration? It makes no sense.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman rightly described the Government's view as daft, but is it not worse than that? As the Minister has said that the Government have no intention of privatising the nuclear industry and that that is not what the Bill does, in the event of an attempt in the future to privatise the sort of activities that the hon. Gentleman has described it could be argued that what the Minister has said today would render that intention ultra vires. Moreover, he has made it even more difficult to carry out his stated purpose.

Dr. Moonie: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point and I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will return to it when he sums up—given the number of hon. Members present, it will be an extensive summing up—the debate. There are a few things in the world worse than being daft. As a former psychiatrist, I can testify to that from my observation of the Government Benches over the past eight years.

In passing, I should mention a further problem. The facilities management division of AEA, as the Minister has described—the part responsible for providing infrastructure support and general services to all AEA's sites—is currently being flogged off to the highest bidder, despite the pleas of the work force and the Opposition to delay the decision until AEA's future is decided. I understand—the Minister confirmed it today—that the contract is to be awarded to a company called Procord, formerly part of IBM, which was run by the present chairman of AEA, Sir Anthony Cleaver, before taking up his present appointment. The Minister should be well aware of how unwholesome such a position might appear

to an impartial observer. However, the Under-Secretary of State may be able to set our minds at rest on that matter when he sums up the debate.

Mr. Eggar: Perhaps I may deal with the matter now, as it is unfair to the current chairman of AEA to allow such a slur to rest, even for a few hours. The current chairman was aware that such a construction could be placed on the matter by Opposition Members. He therefore took no part in the board meeting at which it was decided to allocate the contract to Procord.

Dr. Moonie: I am happy to have that reassurance from the Minister. However, there is a big difference between making slurs and accusations, which I was careful not to do, and raising proper concerns about how Government business is conducted, which is our job even if the right hon. Gentleman does not consider it to be his.

Our second reason for opposing the Bill is that we believe that privatisation is unnecessary. AEA Technology has been operating more than satisfactorily in the public sector as a trading fund for some years. It has been operating successfully, growing and diversifying, and it does not need to be sold off to make a go of things as it is already doing perfectly well in public hands. Unlike Amersham International, which was sold off 12 years ago and had a specialised range of products—a niche market for isotopes—AEA technology provides a wide range of specialist research and technological facilities and expertise. Its value lies entirely in the brains and skills of its employees. Such services might equally well be said to form a legitimate part of the work of a Department of Trade and Industry which took its job seriously.

AEA Technology requires working capital to continue its ambitious programme of expansion. Once again, there is no reason why that could not be sought from banks or investors in the City. The Minister will say that Treasury rules must apply. Why? Why should one Government Department be able to veto such a move? No legal requirement allows it to dictate the pace of expansion of a successful organisation in the public sector. One has only to consider the history of BNFL, before the rules were so conveniently changed a few months ago, the record of the British National Oil Corporation in public hands, or the history of BP following the takeover of Burma Oil in 1974, when the Government had a 70 per cent. stake in that company. None of those companies had any problem operating as plcs within the public sector, and I recall no complaints.

Purely because of the spite of Ministers following their failure over the Post Office, no company can be allowed to operate as a commercial success in public hands. AEA Technology must be sold off and BNFL must come under Treasury rules, purely to ensure that the President of the Board of Trade has an excuse, no matter how pathetic, for saying that nothing can be done for the Post Office either. The rule is that if you are successful you must be sold: there is no alternative—but at least the Department itself is safe enough on the basis of that criterion.

AEA should be allowed to trade commercially as a publicly owned company outside the public sector borrowing requirement. Its profits should be used both to fund future expansion and to defray the cost to the public purse of decommissioning old nuclear facilities and Government reactors. There is no need for a sell-off. AEA is successful and can continue to grow and prosper under public ownership.

The third reason for our opposition to the Bill is our belief that the sale of AEA Technology is not in the national interest. For example, there could be serious consequences for our national research effort. At a stroke, an agency which is the equivalent of the engineering, science and technological faculties of any half dozen of our largest universities will pass out of the Department's hands and we shall lose control of the strategic direction of a highly valuable national asset.

We believe that the vast store of expertise in AEA should be directed towards carrying out work on behalf of the Government. We know that much of the value of AEA to major companies lies in the objectivity that a Government agency brings with it—an objectivity which could no longer be guaranteed if AEA belonged to one of a company's rivals operating in the same area. To get the greatest benefit from AEA technology, we must ensure its independence.

We shall shortly see the first fruits of technology foresight, as the first round of results nears publication. Recommendations as to fruitful areas of investment in 16 distinct technology areas will be made, many of which are currently being studied by AEA. What a golden opportunity for the Department of Trade and Industry to get involved in preparatory research, prior to floating worthwhile projects on the market. Even the Government have admitted that they were rash to withdraw from near-market research in the 1980s.

Here is a chance to put that right, but will the Government take it? I very much doubt it. The Department has cut its support for industry in every year that the Conservative Government have been in office. The Secretary of State abandoned its advanced technology programme on the very day the Science White Paper was published in 1993 by the Office of Science and Technology. I suspect that, once again, we shall see the DTI ducking its responsibilities, behind a glossy smokescreen which promises much and delivers nothing.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Gentleman explain how a company which belongs to the Government and the assets of which are held by the Treasury can possibly operate outside the PSBR rules? Either it belongs to the Government or it does not.

Dr. Moonie: BNFL has done just that for the 15 years the Conservative Government have been in existence. It is only in the past few months that the rules have been changed, so I do not need to give any explanation. It is a perfectly legal and normal thing to do. It is a matter of choice whether the Government do it or not. It is not a matter of obligation.

In the past year, we have had a White Paper on competitiveness from the DTI which has been so successful that, without anything having been done about that one, the Department is to publish a second White Paper on competitiveness this summer. Perhaps that one will meet with more success than the former.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Many of my constituents will be listening to the debate and will want to hear, because they know that nuclear research and nuclear building takes decades—and one never knows, even in the next two or

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

three decades, the Labour party may yet get back into Government—what the Labour party's commitment is to the nuclear industry. May we have that clearly on the record, because that is much more important to many of my constituents, who believe that it will be sooner rather than later that the Labour party gets in, and therefore whether they will have a job in the future.

Dr. Moonie: It will certainly be sooner rather than later. I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we shall keep the nuclear industry in the public sector. More than that I cannot say at the present time. I will, however, wait for the publication of the nuclear review—whenever it comes—with great interest, to see what the Government's plans are for the industry and how well they are received.

Mr. Bruce: We have these exchanges across the Floor, but in past Labour party policy documents there was in effect a commitment never to build another nuclear power station, to seek to remove those currently in existence, particularly Magnox, to bring in more coal-fired power stations, and so on. Is there now a change of policy in the Labour party? Will the new Labour party build new nuclear power stations?

Dr. Moonie: The hon. Gentleman has given a garbled and confused description of Labour party policy.

Mr. Eggar: It was very clear.

Dr. Moonie: The Minister of State may wish that it was perfectly clear, but I assure him that it was not. I do not intend to waste the time of the House discussing putative issues such as that. One thing, however, that the Labour party does see clearly is the need for strategic direction in the provision of long-term energy needs—something that is sadly lacking in the present Government's strategy.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman has admitted, therefore, that the Labour party's energy policy will involve strategic direction. Will it or will it not strategically direct the building of new nuclear power stations?

Dr. Moonie: I shall be happy to give the right hon. Gentleman a lesson in strategic planning any time he wishes, but I certainly do not intend to spend any further time on the side road, as I do not know the answer. If I may, I will return to the matter before us.

Hon. Members may think that the situation that I have described is bad enough, but I am afraid that there is worse to come. Last year, AEA absorbed Warren Spring, the Government's own environmental science research laboratory. We were told that their roles were complementary—another excuse for a budget cut, of course. If this privatisation is allowed to proceed, Warren Spring, a next steps agency, will in effect have been privatised with no parliamentary scrutiny of the procedure whatever.

AEA is also rumoured to have been the successful bidder, as part of a consortium, for the national physical laboratory, which is responsible for setting standards of physical measurement for the nation and is an institution that is respected world-wide. Do Ministers really believe that such a function should be sold off into private hands and that any private company should be entrusted with such a national responsibility? Can the Government not see that there are some things that they must do for themselves? Their policy is stupid and short-sighted and they should think again.

My fourth concern is about the fate of AEA Technology's 4,000 employees. Trade unions representing staff have been vociferous in their criticism of the Government's plans—with justification, when one considers the fate of skilled work forces under all previous sell-offs. As I have already mentioned, AEA has some of the most highly skilled staff of any organisation and its concern for the future is about its employees' jobs, their terms and conditions and their pension rights following the sale of their company. I believe that those legitimate anxieties are fully justified, given the reluctance with which the present Government have applied even the limited protection afforded by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.

I know that some steps have been taken to allay fears about pensions, through the introduction of schedule 3, which we shall debate in detail in Committee. I do not intend to go into it in great detail today. The promise of a pension scheme equivalent to that which employees currently have must be backed up in Committee by rather stronger commitments than exist at present before they are acceptable to the work force or to Opposition Members.

On terms and conditions of service, there will be no such guarantees, and there is a strong likelihood of redundancies, as AEA tries to fatten its balance sheet in preparation for privatisation. Activities which are considered to be marginal or of little short-term commercial relevance will be ruthlessly pruned away, and the work force will go with it. The concerns of the trade unions go even further. The Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists, in a memorandum submitted to the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, commented on the commercial viability of AEA, saying that

"there is a risk of early business failure for the privatised part of AEA, which would cause extra cost and difficulty for the Government. This is because increasing profit projections for Commercial Division rely on exploitation of monopoly situations that currently exist, for example, in the areas of decommissioning and waste management. Without the guarantee of long term Government contracts after flotation, the future of the Division would be at risk. In addition many of the potentially commercial activities assigned to Commercial Division risk failure since they are based on synergies with part of Government Division that would no longer be available to them. They would be unable on their own to demonstrate profitability at a sufficient level in the early stages and, under private sector criteria, would be closed down. Even if it does survive the privatised commercial division is likely to have to change its character."

That is clear enough. I should have thought that the previous experience of the President of the Board of Trade, when he was Secretary of State for Defence, might have induced a little more caution. Perhaps he has forgotten the fate of Defence Technology Enterprise, set up by himself to exploit defence technology in the civil field. Now, alas, it is no more: it closed down as a result of commercial failure of the kind that I have been describing. There is thus a justified trade union fear for AEA Technology.

I shall now deal with some detailed criticisms of the Bill which reinforce our decision to oppose Second Reading. It is clear that Ministers have absolutely no idea what form the sale of AEA Technology will ultimately

take. They just do not know how to do it, only that they must continue with their dogmatic opposition to anything that is good remaining in the public sector. Quite apart from the division of the AEA's business into nuclear and non-nuclear, however specious that may be, a separation which is neither as easy nor as advisable as the Government would have us believe, they do not know when it will be sold, in what manner it will be sold, what size of packages will be involved or who will purchase it.

An editorial in the *Financial Times* suggests that the ideal solution must be a management buy-out which would create a sense of partnership among the companies' employees and guarantee the AEA the independence to underpin its credibility as a consultancy. The alternative would be flotation as a private company. However, that would not be easy as investors would have to be sure that the company had a worthwhile portfolio of contracts and that its principal assets—people—would not walk out of the door. Only as a last resort should the Government consider the remaining option—sale, in whole or in part, to trade purchasers. That would be highly unsatisfactory. The AEA would lose its independence and, if broken up, its range of skills as well. The Government must make it clear early in the Committee stage exactly what their intentions are. We certainly intend to press them further on that important matter.

So far as I can see—I may have missed it—there is no provision in the Bill for the retention of a golden share in AEA Technology, which I hope that the Government will consider as they have done in other enterprises that they have tried to sell off. If they do retain a golden share, what will it be worth? Previous golden shares have been only a temporary respite for the companies involved. In view of the strategic nature of much of the research involved, will the Government ensure that no foreign buyer will be able to take over the company? After all, where research covers sensitive areas, that is a right even under present EC competition rules. Will the Government give that guarantee to the company if it is to be sold into the private sector? They must answer that question before the Bill proceeds much further.

Clause 3 empowers management to take any action that it sees fit to facilitate privatisation. What on earth does that mean? Does it mean larger salaries, share options, better cars, 1,000 redundancies? Some amplification is surely desirable. One thing of which we can be sure is that the work force will see little benefit from such provision as management fatten up this particular calf for privatisation.

Clause 10 removes an important qualification from the members of the board of the AEA. The Atomic Energy Authority Act 1954 stipulated that board members should include people with three particular skills. Clause 1(3) says:

"All the members of the Authority shall be appointed by the Lord President of the Council and of those members—

(*a*) three shall be appointed from amongst persons appearing to the Lord President of the Council to

be persons who have had wide experience of, and shown capacity in dealing with, problems associated with atomic energy; and

(*b*) one shall be appointed from amongst persons appearing to the Lord President of the Council to

have had wide experience of, and shown capacity in, administration and finance; and

(*c*) one shall be appointed from amongst persons appearing to the Lord President of the Council to have had wide experience of, and shown capacity in, the organisation of workers."

Those requirements are all being removed from members of the board of AEA which, in addition, is being reduced in size. I can see the advertisements now: "Join the board of AEA; fat salary available to the right man"—they will be men, of course—"No prior experience necessary; only former Tory Ministers need apply".

The real tragedy of the measure is not the fact that it is being brought before us today, but that there are so many other more worthwhile things that the Department of Trade and Industry could and should be doing instead of wasting our time with such a dubious measure. For instance, we could have had the Bill that everyone but the Government agrees that the Post Office requires to become more competitive in an increasingly complex trading environment while remaining where it belongs—in the public sector, as everyone wants. As I have already pointed out, we could have developed detailed plans to take full advantage of the technology foresight exercise—I bet that the Japanese have.

Ministers might care to look at enacting a proper framework of legislation for competition in Britain to raise our standards to those of our competitors in the United States and the EC. They might even take the logic of the nuclear review a stage further and hold the full-scale strategic inquiry into our long-term energy needs that we believe is necessary. But no—instead, the Government bring this stupid measure before us: a Bill that will damage one of the few institutions of which the Department of Trade and Industry can be proud. What an indictment that is of the sorry bunch masquerading as a Government on the Conservative Benches.

5.14 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): It is always a pleasure to listen to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie). I am a great fan of Scottish accents, and his is wonderfully pleasant.

Unfortunately, I had much difficulty discerning what the Labour party is about. Most hon. Members who are present this afternoon are here for the good reason that they have constituency interests, particularly affecting the employment of their constituents. I should have liked to hear from the hon. Gentleman—who believes, I am sure wrongly, that the Labour party will be in government in two years' time—that the Opposition's strategic planning had extended to deciding whether there should be a nuclear industry. I should be grateful to hear what Opposition Members think about the British nuclear industry.

Mr. Miller: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us what the Minister was unable to tell us—what will be in the nuclear review?

Mr. Bruce: I should be happy to be able to announce today what will be in the nuclear review. I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that he will be pleased to hear it, that the British nuclear industry is rapidly renationalising electricity supply. I say that because the proportion of electricity being generated by the nationalised industries rather than the privatised industries is going up by leaps and bounds.

One of the problems about privatising the nuclear industry is not that it will not make a profit or succeed, but that it is now so large that it could not be privatised in

[Mr. Bruce]

one lump. It represents too large a proportion of electricity supply and generation and so would have an advantage over conventional power stations.

Like the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy, I await with bated breath the results of the nuclear review, but I am confident about its outcome because the Government are fully committed to the nuclear industry and to diversity of supply, which has been so valuable for our country, particularly when we were being held to ransom by some hon. Members who support the Labour party.

Knowing that in recent years the nuclear industry has had to contract its research because of the paucity of new orders for new types of nuclear power station and the lack of any assured continuity of the pressurised water reactor stations, my constituents, who have one of the smaller nuclear sites at Winfrith, are concerned that it might be allowed to wither on the vine.

We had a steam-generating heavy water reactor, which was produced as a demonstrator when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was Secretary of State for Energy. He is a charming and well-respected Member of the House, but he is not well-liked in the nuclear industry in my constituency because it was he who decided to scrap that excellent design in favour of the advanced gas-cooled reactor. It will be a long time before we can fully establish whether the AGR was a success, but my constituents felt that the SGHWR was the right way to go. While it was producing 100 MW for the grid, it was successful, but it has come to the end of its useful life and is being decommissioned. That has meant a reduction in production workers in my constituency. The research side of AEA Technology has been reduced and that too has meant a loss of employment.

My constituents, however, are always thinking in terms of enterprise and continuity of employment. Rather than simply allowing the site to become less and less occupied, they have already persuaded the Defence Research Agency to consolidate most of its operations in Dorset and beyond, to come on to the site and to take up redundant buildings, as well as constructing new ones. AEA Technology must be congratulated on perceiving that as a forward-looking way of dealing with the difficulties of reduced employment. Several other companies also intend to come on to the site, and the opportunities that that will provide for further employment are important to those who currently work for AEA Technology, and to all the divisions.

The nuclear industry has spawned a number of interesting new technologies. The site at Winfrith, for instance, is very good at oil well logging—deciding how much oil is in a well. I was disappointed that, when the Government decided to move part of the Department of Trade and Industry out of London, they opted for Aberdeen rather than Winfrith. A move to Winfrith would have been much more sensible, because much of the technical work that is done for the DTI—enabling decisions to be made about how an oil company can best exploit a well—is done there. I am sorry that my right hon. and hon. Friends were short-sighted in that regard, not least because of the relative distances involved.

I see smiles on the faces of DTI officials—who are now hiding behind the Box—at the wonderful thought of working in Dorset, which is rather nearer to London than Aberdeen. Aberdeen is a wonderful place, of course, but it has already received a good deal of investment; the Government are already committed to Scotland, Wales and the more distant regions, and should be encouraged to help the south and south-west.

Safety cases have always been a feature of nuclear technology. Everyone has always assumed that nuclear is more dangerous than anything else, which is not true. The safety cases for the nuclear industry, however, have an enormous cross-over benefit: we now realise that oilfield and transport technologies, for instance, need the same detailed provision. AEA Technology should be congratulated on having developed that outside the nuclear industry.

I hope that one of the spin-offs of AEA Technology's privatisation will be an opportunity for it to extend its activities into non-nuclear fields, but the Government must not expect it to lose its nuclear expertise. I am certain that they will require it to be "switched on" for nuclear purposes in future, both in the United Kingdom and—perhaps even more important—overseas. I shall deal with the reorganisation issue shortly: I share the concern expressed by a number of hon. Members about the splitting of AEA Technology, and the possible reduction of its ability to compete in important respects.

We often lose sight of technology transfer. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy suggested that it had not worked particularly well for defence, but I believe that technology transfer in AEA Technology has been constantly held back by the fact that the organisation is Government-owned. Treasury rules have limited what it can profitably or sensibly do: for instance, it is currently not supposed to compete with other private organisations. That has nearly always meant that, when AEA Technology has developed a good idea, it has had to license it to another company rather than pursue it for itself. When it has been unable to find a private sector partner, despite believing that its idea has great potential, it has been unable to back its own judgment.

There is clearly a limited market for pure research. When AEA Technology can develop that research, manufacture products and provide services without having to worry about whether its activities are in the public interest or would be approved of by Government, it will be much better off. Employment will also benefit. Of course that is a risky strategy, because such activities can fail; but we cannot simply allow the nuclear research organisations to wait for the Government to come forward with research projects. We know that the Government and the generating industries are likely to spend less on research unless more nuclear power stations are built, or decommissioning is speeded up. We must give those organisations freedom to go out and compete.

Dr. Moonie: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that research-based organisations are not always good at production? There is a logical distinction between the two. Moreover, spending on research and development is highly elastic, especially in view of the business cycle. There is a considerable risk that, if the AEA is entirely dependent on the market, when there is a downturn—as always happens, with or without Government policy—it will suffer as a consequence.

Mr. Bruce: I have acknowledged the risks of moving into other areas of production. I was interested to note what the hon. Gentleman said about cutting off, as it were, some of the AEA's current arms by decommissioning. It

will, of course, suffer as a result of that. But if a management is looking for opportunities and taking a conservative—with a small "c"—view of the future, high technology and technology transfer should be at the forefront of its mind. It should consider how to transfer its technology into production; after all, that is what the United Kingdom will live on in the future. How that is done must be up to management. I agree with the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy that it is important to use those with good production skills, but management must have the freedom to make commercial deals that are in the best interests of AEA Technology and, ultimately, the creation of jobs and UK Ltd.

I hope that I have explained why I think that privatisation is the right course. Let me deal next with the genuine concerns of many of my constituents, which have already featured in the debate and will no doubt be mentioned again. I trust that I have made it plain that my constituents are not Luddites; they are not in the business of saying no for the sake of it. I therefore feel that the Government should listen to them carefully.

The Bill gives some reassurance about pensions. With previous privatisations, Opposition Members have often complained that the Bills involved contained no provision to help with pensions. We must ensure that people feel that their pensions are being properly looked after and that their future well-being is at the forefront of the Government's transfer plans.

Redundancies are also a real worry. Many of my constituents are saying, "I have many skills. The Government and AEA Technology may want to make me redundant; there have been some generous redundancy schemes in the past. Yes please, I will grab the redundancy and then take my place in the job market." As a constituency Member of Parliament, I do not want those people to take redundancy at this stage. I believe that AEA Technology has a great future, but we must reassure people.

In three, four or five years' time, AEA Technology may well be owned by a large multinational company. If people believed that the new employer could give them the minimum statutory redundancy pay and then push them out into the marketplace, they would feel that the Government had betrayed them. In recent years, the Government have rightly looked after employees who have been made redundant. The Government have an excellent record on privatisation and on helping people to move from Government to private sector employment, but I cannot emphasise strongly enough that all constituency Members of Parliament will be keen to ensure that the Government maintain their high standards. I shall certainly be at the forefront of doing so on behalf of my constituents.

I know that Ministers will say that, of course, management knows what is right, that it has a wonderful system of reorganisation and that they will back its ability to make the right decisions. My constituents, however, lack confidence in what management is saying. There is some justification for that feeling because management has reorganised AEA Technology almost annually, perhaps even bi-annually, which has sapped people's morale.

Clearly, we are approaching the point at which the Government will say, "This is the right reorganisation, the management has got it right, we will enshrine it by keeping a Government division, selling off the services and putting AEA Technology's operation and research arms into the private sector." We must be careful to ensure, however, that management has got it right, and even more careful that no evidence exists that the management's suggestion on the way forward has been overruled by Department of Trade and Industry officials, who recommend it to Ministers, who then rubber stamp what they think is the management's decision, but is actually the management decision as modified by the DTI.

It has been suggested to me on a number of occasions that management has agreed a trade-off with the DTI, which has said, "If you get rid of this, we will not hammer you on something else." I do not want to go into detail and embarrass individuals. One must appreciate that, effectively, the organisation's management is now made up of civil servants, who cannot talk publicly about what they want. Ministers should consider carefully what is being said to them and try to get the best deal for the future of AEA Technology.

I have nailed my colours to the mast, unlike the Labour party, which is not in favour of privatisation. Privatisation will be good, but we must ensure that we get it right and that employees are given an assurance that it is not some form of redundancy scheme, with the Government, as an easy way of getting rid of the research side and 4,000 employees, shoving them off into a company. If it failed, no embarrassment would be caused by a Minister having to say what the problem was at the Dispatch Box. That will not happen, but Ministers need to ensure that they are certain that the proposal will have a good chance of flying.

I notice the removal of large amounts of debts and liabilities from all wings of AEA Technology. The Government are doing their best to ensure that they leave a company that has low-cost assets and that could really do something in the market. That is important.

One specific matter confused many of us who were enthusiastic about AEA Technology going into the private sector. Decommissioning work is undertaken in what was known in my constituency as building A59. Such decommissioning is undertaken at a number of AEA Technology sites. The Government division did not need to undertake that decommissioning work—it could have been done in the private sector and was originally left with AEA Technology. I did not disagree with that. Then a deal was struck at the DTI, and decommissioning was promptly transferred from AEA Technology and back to the Government division, so that the Government division could sell it off to another company. I was not totally convinced that that was wrong, but I was concerned about what happened.

The Government and, I think, the DTI said that decommissioning could be undertaken by a number of different companies and that a competitive market should exist for decommissioning companies. I do not disagree with that. But why should not AEA Technology have a decommissioning arm? It knows about the subject. It has a research base and management for that. From day one, management would have been able to bid for decommissioning work in the marketplace. It was not necessary to sell it off to another company, which would

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then have that facility and which would be able to bid against other private sector companies going for decommissioning work.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): Given his diligence as a constituency Member, in the past few months the hon. Gentleman will have made a number of inquiries about those matters. Does not he think that hon. Members will find it extraordinary that he now says that they cause him great puzzlement? Should not they have been sorted out to his satisfaction? He would then not have needed to express his worries to the House. Does that leave the rest of us with any confidence in the Bill?

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for looking after my interests. As I am sure he appreciates as a constituency Member with detailed knowledge of the matter, I have pursued my interests both with Ministers and with different members of the management. *[Interruption.]* He should listen to my answer. I have explored this matter with a number of members of the senior management in AEA Technology. The answers that I received were not uniform. Some members of the management team, who I greatly respect, believe that this move is in the best interests of all the employees. That, after all, is what the DTI appears to be saying. Other members of the team are troubled by it. I know it is a big troubling factor for employees. They see a sub-plot that has not been fully explained to them. We must move carefully.

My understanding is that the work has already been sent out to companies that might want to take it over. Ministers should ensure that a bid by a new company to undertake the work will be put to the test. We should know whether employees will be better off from that move and what the continuity of the work will be. After all, decommissioning on the Winfrith site will end within the next two years, at which point employees expect to be made redundant. What proposal provides a better chance of them having work, and what are the chances of them having the same redundancy deal that they would have received from the Government? Those are important factors.

If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is not satisfied with hiving off decommissioning work, he should talk to AEA Technology about the possibility of taking it back under its wing and continuing, as part of the privatisation, to keep it together. I rely on my hon. Friend. I notice that he is taking detailed notes of this, as, I am sure, are his officials. I hope that they will consider the matter in great detail. As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) suggested, I have unfinished business. I shall keep a close eye on it.

Before AEA Technology is privatised, it is important to have the nuclear review. I heard my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry say that privatisation would have been unlikely without the results of the nuclear review. I take that as an assurance that we will know about that. After all, what company could make a bid for the work without knowing the UK nuclear industry's future? The two Opposition parties are good at criticising Government policy on everything under the sun, but they have failed to tell us their thinking on the nuclear industry. The trade unions in the nuclear industry have quietened some of the more vociferous anti-nuclear protestors who have been screaming about closing down the industry, but that threat is still very real.

The fast breeder reactor programme was put on ice because we know that, in the next 30 years before it will be needed, it is likely that there will be a Government of a different political persuasion. What was the point of this Conservative Government spending taxpayers' money now when the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party have said that they would not build the reactor, even if it was in the market interest to do so. I notice that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East is shaking his head. I hope that he will mention that in his speech. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is wandering around looking rather lost. Perhaps he would care to remain in his seat.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I am not lost, particularly not on these matters, my lad.

Mr. Bruce: I am glad to hear that.

I want to talk about the future and the nuclear review. I know that John Collier, the chairman of Nuclear Electric, is keen to see that the great success that has been achieved by himself, his management team and every employee in the nuclear industry is recognised by the Government. They want to know that the Government realise that the nuclear industry is no longer a lame duck. It needs to be given the ability to go out and sell itself to the distributors and those who want to buy electricity in a profitable way. At long last we are starting to see the promise of the nuclear industry being fulfilled.

We need to know about the programme for decommissioning. We need to know whether the Magnox stations will be decommissioned at a faster or a slower rate and we need to know about the life of particular types of power stations. It is important for people to know that before we privatise AEA Technology.

It has been mentioned that Barclay Laboratories may move away from the control of Nuclear Electric and into a possible merger with AEA Technology. That is important and it also needs to be looked at before we sell off AEA Technology.

I am sorry that I am losing the attention of Opposition Members because my notes say that at this point I should deal with the policies of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats on nuclear electricity. However, there is then a blank in my speech. That is because, since the Opposition parties were trounced at the last general election, we have heard very little from them about that subject. Opposition Members may wish to campaign in my constituency, but some of those in my constituency have been in the nuclear industry for 30 years. They want to hear words of comfort from the Opposition parties. They do not want to hear that the Opposition parties are void of policy and fresh thinking. They want to hear that the Opposition know that we need a home nuclear industry to go out and sell our industry overseas. The Opposition are failing their constituents and the few of my constituents who choose to vote for them by not telling us about their policies.

Dr. Moonie *rose—*

Mr. Bruce: I am so glad that the hon. Gentleman wants to tell us about the Labour party's policy on this.

Dr. Moonie: I am afraid not. The hon. Gentleman can hardly expect any party to come forward with plans for

the future of the nuclear industry before the nuclear review is public knowledge. Any future plans for our energy generation must depend on that.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for an assurance that the Labour party will announce its nuclear policy shortly after the Government announce the nuclear review. I shall remind him on 1 January 1996—that should provide a sensible amount time for both those things to happen—that he will be announcing, as soon as is practicable, in a pamphlet or some other form what will happen with the nuclear industry over the next three or four decades when, eventually, the Labour party comes to power.

I have been speaking for more than long enough to give an indication of my feelings on this issue. I entreat the Government to rely upon the staff at all levels within AEA Technology. They should be able to offer a positive view about what they feel should be happening in their own industry. The Government should listen to their concerns and recommendations and do whatever they can to reassure them. Her Majesty's Government owe a debt of gratitude and a duty of care to AEA's employees. I support the Bill enthusiastically, but I can assure Ministers that I will continue to remind the Government of these important matters and ensure that they do not short change this country's nuclear industry in any way.

5.45 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) proclaimed himself a friend of the Government and a supporter of the Bill, but each of his questions was like a dagger being struck through the cloak or toga of the Minister. By the end of his speech, his friendship seemed like the friendship of Brutus for Julius Caesar. There was not a great deal left of the Bill by the time he had finished. Since he felt it necessary to refight the battle of the steam-generating heavy water reactor some years after the event in order to prove a rather arcane point about the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I do not think that I shall follow him very far in his comments.

I thought that the more penetrating question came from the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) in his intervention during the Minister's speech. He asked whether the House would have any say about the mode of privatisation. The Minister's reply was oracular and oblique, when it should have been direct and straightforward. If the Minister is not prepared to tell the House today why and in what manner he proposes to privatise the industry, the Bill should never have been brought before us. The Bill leaves more questions unanswered than answered.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission was invited by the Government to make good the deficiencies of their own thinking about the nuclear industry. In 1992, it produced an authoritative report that explicitly said that the privatisation of the commercial parts of the Atomic Energy Authority should be postponed until after the nuclear review was complete. Yet the Government have today brought the Bill before us for Second Reading, not heeding the advice of their own commission.

The Government have had report after report on the future of the AEA and its commercial activities. They have been consistent in their inconsistency. The first of the reports—the McKinsey report—was totally inconsistent with the BZW report. BZW proposed that the whole of AEA Technology should not be privatised as one enterprise and that the commercial division, as it then was, should be made available to any comer to pick off the pieces that it thought it might acquire. That view was cited as support for the argument by the Minister responsible for privatisation, but he has not been clear this afternoon about whether he accepts the logic that, according to BZW, there has not been any evidence of a single purchaser willing or interested in acquiring AEA Technology.

That lack of evidence was in a report published two years ago and there may have been developments since then; but, if there have been, it would have been candid of the Minister to tell the House this afternoon. What are these developments? Who is waiting in the wings to purchase the commercial interests of our British research effort?

We know already who has been picking up the pieces in other areas. It was announced recently that Procord was taking over the facilities service division, of which the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) spoke. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, Procord is very closely associated with Sir Anthony Cleaver, the current chairman of AEA Technology. I cast no aspersions whatever on Sir Anthony, but the connection is noted and it inevitably raises questions. It raises similar questions to those raised about the new director of Dounreay, whose association with Hunting-BRAE has also been noted. Questions have been asked about whether he is fattening up his new charge for the picking by someone else with whom he was associated in former commercial activities.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman repeat that outside the Chamber?

Mr. Maclennan: As a matter of fact, I have already said that in my constituency. I do not hide behind the shield of parliamentary privilege to make claims of fact.

The Bill seems flawed from the start by its uncertainty. It asks the House to give the Government a blank cheque, as the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy said, and to enable them to choose the moment at which they will flog off however so much they choose of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's commercial activities in a manner unprescribed by the Bill, save for the exclusion of certain responsibilities for nuclear safety and certain freehold property. Such an enabling Bill brings legislation into contempt. It is not the purpose of Parliament to write such broad prescriptions to enable Ministers to do as they like, when they like, for whatever cost or charge they like and with so little explanation of the reasons why.

It is said that it is necessary to capitalise on the commercial activities of UKAEA, especially of AEA Technology. There is a tendency to confuse ends and means and, in particular, to confuse the proper role of the AEA, which has been to provide a research facility for the nuclear industry, to keep this country at the forefront of that industry and to ensure contemporaneously that the decommissioning and waste management work is done with the highest regard for safety and the environment.

That is certainly true and we can take pleasure and pride in the AEA's diversification of its activities on the margin into important areas of research which are not directly related to the nuclear industry. Those opportunities, however, have been ancillary to its core duty and there is some evidence that the Government are

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losing sight of that core duty and its role: it is to secure a safe nuclear component for energy generation in this country.

It cannot be surprising that emphasis on new commercialism is giving rise to concerns around the country that the core function of the authority is being lost sight of and that it will be put in jeopardy by the approach to privatisation, for the companies involved have commercial ends. They are concerned more with profits and less with service provision.

The hon. Member for Wantage deserved a less obscure answer than that the Minister's words would repay careful study. However one studies the words, if one studies them like the words of a medieval schoolman for meaning or with the ingenuity of Michael Ventris trying to decipher Mycenaean Greek and linear B, the message is clear: the Minister is not prepared to say. It is not that he does not understand that he is asking the House to allow him to do what he wants when he wants. He is simply—transparently—not prepared to declare his purpose today.

Is the outcome to be a management buy-out? Sir Anthony Cleaver says that that has not been seriously considered. Has it been seriously considered by the Department? Perhaps the Under-Secretary will tell us. From the wreathed smiles of the Minister, we were supposed to divine that, perhaps, that had not been entirely ruled out. Is it to be a trade-sharing approach, which explicitly won the backing of BZW, or the cherry-picking approach, which the hon. Member for South Dorset apparently does not favour? The hon. Gentleman, at least, was not persuaded by the arguments put forward by BZW, but was the Minister persuaded? We are entitled to know. Is there to be a flotation? If so, on what terms and on what time scale?

The industry has suffered too much uncertainty. It is not fair to the people working in the business to reorganise and reorganise as has been done. There has been no Government vision, no direction and no sense. Indeed, I pray in aid what the hon. Member for South Dorset said about that, too, in his concluding remarks. From the date on which the Government established the trading fund basis, to which I did not object, a year has not gone by in which there has not been some fundamental attempt to rearrange the pieces on the chess board.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for constantly referring to my speech. I hope that he will read it because, clearly, he was not listening to it. I wonder whether, on behalf of his party—I am glad to say that he has open house because no other Liberal Democrats are here to listen to him—he could tell us the Liberal Democrats' policy on nuclear power. The hon. Gentleman is a great advocate for his own constituents at Dounreay and is a regular attender of such debates, but one does not seem to get the same message coming from the Liberal Democrats' conclave at their conferences.

Mr. Maclennan: The Liberal Democrats have consistently supported nuclear research in their manifestos. We are concerned, as every party in the House should be, about the careful and safe management of nuclear liabilities. I believe that the Conservatives have done more damage to the nuclear industry than any other party in the House. I do not exclude from that point the party of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, who decided to do down the steam-generating heavy water reactor. He also introduced the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 which has enabled the build-up of commercial activity to take place.

When the Conservative party took office, we heard about the series ordering of nuclear power stations. Where has that series ordering been? In 16 years, we have had only Sizewell B, which has not been a notable success. The rather convoluted suggestion by the hon. Member for South Dorset about the decision in 1988 to close down the prototype fast reactor by Mr. Cecil Parkinson, as he then was, and should have remained, is scarcely credible.

I agree with the argument of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy that it is damaging to the national interest to embark on the route of privatisation at this time. It is also conceptually unreal to seek to divide the nuclear from the non-nuclear and the commercial from the non-commercial because the non-commercial has led to the development of the commercial. The close integration of work on what was patently non-profitable allowed the research that has led to the development of skills in descaling and pipelines, which have been a profitable sideline at Dounreay. Such activity did not stem from a determination to go out into the marketplace to find new work. It stemmed from the application of skills that had been developed in the non-commercial field. The same is broadly true of other work done.

Will the Under-Secretary spend a moment trying to understand the risks involved in proceeding as the Government intend? I do not mean him personally, because he is new to the Department and to the Government. The AEA is moving from a site management model to a model that completely fractures the cohesion of the sites and the clearly understood missions of those working on the sites.

What has happened at Dounreay in the past couple of years is appalling, demoralising and disturbing. The facilities service division has been carved out and the whole structure of businesses, which was put in place only a couple of years earlier, has been dismantled. AEA Technology was up for grabs. Another series of provisions are in contemplation for the engineering services and for the decommissioning work of the Dounreay fast reactor which is, apparently, also to be made the work of another outside body brought on to the site.

Only yesterday, it was announced that a site managing agency arrangement will be entered into. That will bring on to the site yet another bunch of strangers who are supposed to pull the different organisations together into a coherent whole and to secure the safety and environmental acceptability of what is being done. They will have to ensure the commercial profitability of the parts of the industry that are commercial and they will have to deal with the core work of decommissioning and reprocessing. It is a pretty tall order, not just for those innocents who are straying abroad on to the site at Dounreay, but for all who have worked there for years trying to follow the latest twists and turns of Government policy and of the authority which has been beaten around so vigorously in recent years. It has been a matchless experience—a visionless waste of opportunity. I hope that something can be retrieved from the wreckage. Not much will be retrieved by the Bill.

6.4 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to his new position. This is his debut on the Front Bench and we all wish him well in his wind-up speech. He will have many questions to answer and I hope that he will be able to deal with them in the time allotted to him.

I have followed the development of the Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell in my constituency for 16 years, first when I became a Member of the European Parliament for the area in 1979 and subsequently as the Member of Parliament for Wantage since 1983. Harwell has been an impressive story of successful adaptation to adverse circumstances. The Bill, which will enable the privatisation of the bulk of the AEA, is a critical step in the process of adaptation and one that should help the authority to continue successfully in the future, if it is handled properly.

I support the Bill in principle, but I have a number of concerns about the way in which privatisation is to be effected and about the details, especially as they affect my constituents who work in the Harwell laboratory, at the AEA headquarters and in the Culham laboratory on the other side of the river in the Henley constituency of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

I offer some general reflections on the background to the Bill. The AEA belongs to a generation of organisations which can be found all over the advanced industrial world, from the United States through western Europe to the former Soviet Union. Almost everywhere, such organisations face considerable difficulties. It is important to bear in mind the fact that the AEA is not unique.

The generation of organisations to which the AEA belongs originated in world war two when science was applied with such success to political purposes in the shape of the atomic bomb. The model for the AEA was developed for scientific research for military purposes in world war two. Among its features were the idea of the crash programme and the total dedication of teams of scientists to a single objective. Economic considerations were largely discounted. The programmes were managed within a military-bureaucratic command structure. There was a marked emphasis on security, leading to the choice of physically remote sites. Harwell was constructed on a disused airfield in the countryside at some distance from Oxford and Reading. The best available young scientific brains were recruited on a permanent civil service basis.

Over the decades, since the establishment of the AEA, there have been many developments, some of which have been mentioned in the debate. They include the separation of the military aspects at an early stage, the spinning off of a number of commercially successful undertakings and the growth of non-nuclear work after the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. Yet the basic structures and the basic culture of the post-war period have remained in place and intact at AEA. They still seem to be in place and intact in the thinking of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie). It was interesting and ironic to find nostalgia for the world of Clement Attlee on the day after the national executive of the Labour party had voted to do away with clause IV in its traditional form. The hon. Gentleman, who is a psychiatrist, will know how to cope with this schizophrenia.

Forty years on, with the benefit of hindsight, when we look back at the construction of AEA and similar organisations after the war, we can pose questions that perhaps were not sufficiently fully considered at the time. What happens when the tenured brains, the scientific civil servants, grow older together? How is that to be managed in institutions relatively isolated from the wider academic community? What happens as science becomes more and more complicated, and there is an increasing need for interaction with other centres of research? What happens as the single-minded dedication of hot war and cold war fades, and economic questions increasingly raise their ugly heads? Above all, what happens when the concept of a single dedicated purpose becomes blurred?

All those question marks and others besides have been raised over many of the wartime and post-war research organisations. I remember vividly a visit that I paid to the German nuclear research centre at Jülich in the early 1980s. That institution was comparable with Harwell, although slightly smaller, and it had suffered the cancellation of the project to which it had been dedicated and for which it had been established—the German "pebble" reactor, I believe. There was a moribund air about the place—hundreds of highly intelligent men and women with nothing much to do were waiting for something to turn up. In that case the hope was for a new dedicated project, an atom smasher, which was subsequently allocated elsewhere.

I remember thinking at the time that Harwell seemed to be in a much better position. But that was just before the British Government finally decided to go ahead with pressurised water reactors, and also just before the decision to privatise the electricity industry brought to the fore the real economic costs of nuclear power—or, more specifically, the costs of the outstanding nuclear liabilities.

Those developments in the Government's wider energy policy, dethroning the central objective of the UKAEA, for which it had been established, have posed for the authority profound questions about its identity and future. Although that presented huge managerial problems it also constituted a major human problem.

The approach of AEA, which I have followed closely as it has evolved over the years, has been to retain its nuclear strength as far as possible, while expanding its non-nuclear expertise and business. It has sought to internationalise its business and at the same time to become more like a business—a trend that leads from the 1965 Act through the trading fund of the late 1980s to the privatisation that we are considering today.

I believe that that fundamental reorientation has been tackled successfully. If we compare 1986-87 with 1994—roughly a 10-year period—we find that the nuclear business covered by a grant from the Department of Energy has fallen from 50 per cent. to about 27 per cent of AEA activity. That transition covers the end of all reactor development, together with an increase in decommissioning activity.

The non-nuclear business, on the other hand, has increased substantially. In 1986-87 about 5 per cent. of UKAEA activity was contracted to other Government Departments for non-nuclear work. That proportion has now risen to about 15 per cent. There has been a contraction in work done for the United Kingdom public sector as a whole, including what was formerly the Central Electricity Generating Board, from about 30 per cent. of AEA activity to about 20 per cent. On the other

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hand, sales to the United Kingdom private sector have risen from 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. Sales overseas have increased from about 5 per cent. to about 20 per cent. That all constitutes a considerable success against an unpromising background.

There has been some reduction in the size of the organisation. That is sad but inevitable, and it has been well managed in human terms. Speaking as the constituency Member of Parliament for some of the people affected, I have to say that there have been few complaints and that I appreciate the approach of the Government and of the management, which have eased the pain of change.

However, I am not saying that the picture is altogether that of a smooth and easy transition. We got some of the flavour of what has happened, as seen from the perspective of Dounreay, in the speech of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). As he said, there has been much demoralising reorganisation and re-reorganisation. In that respect it might have been better if the Government had set privatisation as a target in the mid-1980s.

Although the trading fund was an important preliminary to privatisation, its introduction was associated with new structures, which have all now been reconstructed again for the purpose of AEA privatisation. But I do not think that we can blame the Government for not making up their mind earlier about that difficult and complex issue. I certainly cannot say that in the mid-1980s I was urging them to rush ahead with a programme of privatisation.

Perhaps the most important development to influence the Government's approach to such matters has been their new thinking on the wider issue of how Departments meet their research and development requirements—new thinking with which I had something to do as a Minister at the Office of Public Service and Science. Among other things, that new thinking has led Government to a clearer sense of the distinction between science for use and science for purely intellectual purposes.

I hope that the other great research institution in my constituency, the Rutherford Appleton laboratory, which is next door to Harwell, will continue to benefit from the Government's refreshed understanding of their special role and responsibility in relation to basic science. The mission of AEA and Harwell as institutions serving science for use has now been more fully clarified, although of course with some difficulties in connection with the former underlying research programme.

It is now much clearer that AEA's role in relation to Government is as a contractor organisation serving a market in which it is no longer tied to any single purchaser. The logic of that development must lead to privatisation, which will help to develop a wider customer base in the private sector and abroad to compensate for its loss of a secure tied customer in the form of the Department of Energy and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Before concluding my general observations about the Government's R and D procurement policy I shall make one more comment. For a contractual relationship to work successfully there must be two intelligent partners—an intelligent customer and an intelligent contractor. I am sure that AEA can function as an intelligent and business-like contractor to Government and to other organisations. But I am not so sure that the Government are equally capable of acting in the long term as an intelligent customer.

Each Department has its own research budget, and all are subject to the annual public expenditure cycle. So long as organisations such as AEA contract preponderantly with the Government, their future must be vulnerable to fragmented short-term decisions in purchaser Departments. I see it as a critical role of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Office of Public Service and Science to ensure that we do not waste important national assets by failing to adopt an overall strategic view of the role of the Government as a purchaser of R and D. It seems a pity that there is no Minister from that Department here for this debate on a most important scientific and technological matter.

I shall now deal with what I consider to be the critical issues of detail for the privatisation. First and foremost is the form of the sale, and the way in which that will affect the future integrity of AEA Technology. Like the management of AEAT, the unions there and my constituents who work at Harwell and Culham, I believe that the Government should attempt to privatise AEAT as a single entity, and should adopt a form of sale conducive to that objective. That is to say, AEAT should be privatised by flotation rather than by a trade sale.

There are many reasons why the privatisation should be unitary. First, AEA is already successful as a single company. It currently has sales of about £250 million and profits of £10 million, and the management forecast is that in three years sales will increase to £350 million, with profits of £40 million.

Secondly, much of the value of AEA Technology comes from its breadth of skills and its ability to assemble integrated multi-disciplinary teams of specialists providing a comprehensive range of facilities.

Thirdly, size is vital in winning business in overseas markets, where there is bound to be concern about confidence in continuity. Any suggestion of a break-up would undermine confidence and thus AEAT's ability to win large long-term overseas contracts. I am not sure whether the Government fully understand the way in which customers for services such as those provided by AEAT need to build long-term relationships with suppliers. If customers cannot see a long-term future for AEAT, they will have little incentive to stay loyal to it.

Fourthly, it is also important to recognise that the independence of AEAT from the suppliers of capital goods gives it a significant advantage over many of its competitors, and a break-up and trade sale would threaten that independence.

Fifthly, the Government must recognise that businesses such as AEAT are above all people businesses, and I was pleased to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said about that. The key asset of a business such as AEAT is the skills and ability of its work force, the best of whom will go elsewhere if they feel uncertain about their personal future. Losing contracts and staff will waste a national asset and if that is not a primary concern of the Treasury, it must be said that that would also reduce the sale price of AEAT.

Sixthly, in recognising that this is a people business, it is important that the form of the sale should be such as to facilitate employee participation in the ownership of the new company. The Government believe in that in

principle, and I noted my hon. Friend the Minister's personal support for it. Employee participation is particularly important in an organisation such as AEAT, and it should be a major consideration in pointing in the direction of a flotation as a way of dealing with privatisation.

Seventhly, we must also recognise that although the nuclear role of AEAT has diminished, it is still of critical importance in providing the integrated services required by Britain's nuclear generators and by NIREX. If AEAT withers and fragments, the only alternative to customers will be to go overseas, which will lead to the further erosion of the British technology base.

Eighthly, technology transfer is critical to the success of a technologically oriented economy and happens routinely within the present structure of AEAT. Fragmentation would make that more difficult, and in particular it would reduce the impact that AEAT can have in helping small and medium-sized enterprises to benefit from technology transfer.

When the privatisation decision was announced in November, I wrote to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to press the Government to give assurances about their intentions regarding the future structure of AEAT. I pressed for the privatisation to be accomplished by a flotation, rather than by an offer for sale, as being the most likely means of producing the structure we need.

I received a reply on 15 December from the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Industry and Energy, who recently left the Government in rather odd circumstances, in which he said:

"I appreciate that you and other colleagues in the House will be looking for some statements on our intentions".

We have been given some helpful clarification by the speech of the Minister of State, and I particularly noted my hon. Friend's words about selling AEAT as a single integrated whole. That is an important commitment on the part of the Government, and it is one that I take seriously.

However, I was not convinced by my hon. Friend's remarks about the core business of AEAT, a topic about which we had some exchanges during his speech. Nor was I satisfied by what my hon. Friend said about the role of Parliament in relation to the final decisions which the Bill will enable.

The other major issue that arises from the privatisation concerns the vexed issue of the continuity under new trading conditions of employee rights and privileges which have been built up over the years in the public sector, the most important of which concern pensions. I am sure that we will have an extensive debate about that in Committee. I note what my hon. Friend said about the Government's desire for a fair and just settlement, and I am sure that they will honour that commitment.

The trade unions at AEAT tell me that they are seeking a continuation of index-linking and that they expect the rights of employees to be protected in this Bill on the same basis as they were when the atomic weapons research establishment was contractorised. There may be a significant parallel in that case, although I am aware that it is not completely analogous. I would be grateful if the Minister could state where he sees the points of similarity or difference between this privatisation and the contractorisation of the AWRE, with special reference to pensions.

The unions have also made sound points about the management of redundancies, and they have pointed out that redundancies become more difficult to resolve when the size of the employer decreases. They argue the case for dealing with redundancies in common across all the companies, so that the best possible use of redeployment and retraining opportunities can be made while avoiding unnecessary costs and unnecessary additional redundancies.

The unions are arguing that each company into which employees are transferred—whether it is publicly owned or not—should have redundancy rules and payments to mirror those of the UKAEA. That would, of course, be a constraint on the new management, but there may be a case here which deserves consideration, as does another union point concerning general redeployment across successive companies. There are many employees who have a breadth of experience and many areas of skill within AEAT and, therefore, potentially in the successor companies. It would be of benefit if employees were able to apply for vacancies in any successor companies, as long as they remain in public ownership.

I believe that the Bill is to be welcomed in principle, but the way in which the privatisation is to be effected raises a number of serious questions on which Parliament should expect to continue to be consulted. In one of my interventions during the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister, I noted that the Bill gives the Secretary of State powers to reorganise or transfer parts of the UKAEA, or to approve such action, without further reference to Parliament. I am not happy about that. The Government should give an indication in Committee of how they will provide further opportunities for parliamentary debates and votes once the Bill has been passed and the privatisation process has begun.

6.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I shall outline one or two general points of interest to hon. Members before I come to the thrust of my comments. I approach the debate without the single fixed ideology that seems to exist on the Government Benches, that everything that is in the public sector is best in the private sector. Nor do I take the view that everything in the private sector is best in the public sector. I take the view that we need to take a balanced approach to the needs of the British economy and British science.

I shall illustrate my point by bringing to the attention of the House the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. I thought that it was entirely wrong for the OPCS as an institution to be privatised, but I could see that there was a sound logic in privatising the purchasing and provision of its computer hardware. That area could best be dealt with in the private sector, and the public sector could not move fast enough to meet the needs of the rapidly changing technology.

When the Select Committee on Science and Technology took evidence from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on the scrutiny review, we were given an assurance that issues in the interests of British science would take precedence over the Government's ideology. But once again, we see in this debate that that is not the case. The Government start with the ideology and fix their arguments around it to ensure that they end up with the formula that they want.

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

I worked for several years in geology using X-radiation as an analytical tool. In that period of my life, I took a great deal of interest in the work of the Atomic Energy Authority and many of its spin-off technologies, which have been discussed in today's debate. I have the British Nuclear Fuels location at Capenhurst in my constituency. I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who has now looked up from busily scribbling his notes, that BNFL and more recently Urenco, the newly floated subsidiary and partnership with the Dutch and German industries, has worked remarkably well within the public sector, but outside the constraints of the Treasury rules. Those models can and do work. If the Government woke up to the opportunity, they could be applied to other industries. The Post Office is well at the top of my list, but other parts of the public sector could also be considered.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): The hon. Gentleman keeps referring to how commercial activities can be run under some sort of state umbrella. Why did not the Labour Government do that for British Telecom in the late 1970s when it badly needed money for development?

Mr. Miller: The Minister raises an interesting point, but the difference between now and then is the enormous technological leaps that have been made in the science base of that industry since that time. System X was not on stream then. It is on stream now. It has taken us into a new generation of technology and the arguments have changed dramatically. If the Minister wants to come back and use the same argument for any other industry that has a science base, I can find an equally logical argument for him. As it happens, I know a little about the technology of the telecommunications industry. *[Interruption.]* I think that the Minister said from a sedentary position—I do not want to put words in his mouth—that it would not wash. It will wash. That fact can be demonstrated by a careful examination of the telecommunications industry.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is not the real reason why a public company cannot operate within any public sector rules that industries always come behind the vital public services such as our national health service, education and everything else in the queue for investment? Therefore, companies such as the Post Office and AEA Technology are always starved of investment funds. That is why companies such as British Gas, which has tripled its investment since privatisation, have become worldwide successes.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point in the context of the Post Office as it is currently formulated, but the Government have allowed BNFL and its new subsidiary Urenco commercial freedom to raise money in the markets. The answer is that if the Treasury rules need to be changed, let us change them. If there is joint interest among hon. Members on both sides of the House in achieving a balanced approach in the interests of British science, those Treasury rules could be changed immediately.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): The hon. Gentleman mentioned BNFL. Clearly, a way was found in the past to give a certain amount of commercial freedom to BNFL. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the classification recently suggested for BNFL by the Central Statistical Office highlights the problem of public companies in the public sector trying to act like private companies? A much simpler solution is to put them in the private sector to avoid the problem that has occurred.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman looks for a simple solution. I think that it is a simple solution based on a one-track ideology. If there are problems based on the Treasury rules, the answer is to change the rules.

In the past 18 months I have had the privilege of undertaking a study of Nuclear Electric under the auspices of an Industry and Parliament Trust fellowship. Some of the points that have come out of that study are inappropriate to the debate and it would be unfair to Nuclear Electric to bring them to the attention of the House. I am committed to making a presentation to the company early in April. That experience has been particularly enlightening.

It was interesting that the Minister failed to respond to the observations that I made about the effect of this privatisation on Berkeley Technology Centre. I know that the Minister has been there. He visited the centre just a few weeks before I did. It is interesting that in his speech he failed to understand that there were overlapping areas of research. They deliberately overlap at present for the clear reason that it is necessary to separate the power generators' responsibility from the responsibilities of the parts of the industry that provide advice to the Health and Safety Executive. I understand that that is the principal reason for that overlap.

Given what the Minister said, it is difficult to see how we can be assured, without knowing what is in the nuclear review, that those commitments can be maintained. We heard from the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) that he and, as we know, other Conservative Members want to dispose of the nuclear industry. One can easily envisage a commercial link in a free market between Berkeley Technology Centre and parts of what is currently the Atomic Energy Authority. Such a link would not be in the public interest. There seems to be no provision in the Bill to deal with that. We have no prior knowledge of the content of the nuclear review. That fact alone provides a powerful argument for deferring any decisions on taking forward the Bill.

The House should congratulate the Library on its publication 95/32. It has provided an extremely well set out series of points for hon. Members participating in the debate. I intend to draw on the document in a few moments, but, first, I should like to comment on a few of the points that the Minister made. His first sentence was that the Bill did not lead to nuclear privatisation. I wonder whether the Under-Secretary will make a statement to the House on whether the Government have dropped the idea of nuclear privatisation. The debate would be far more logical if we had an understanding of what the Government were doing. We have pressed on several occasions for information about the review and we have not obtained an answer.

I do not know what is in the nuclear review. I guess, because he is not intervening, that the Under-Secretary does not know what is in the review. If he does know, he has chosen to withhold the information from the House. That puts the House at a disadvantage in this important debate.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that the difficult position in which we find ourselves is caused by the Government's lack of any energy policy and the difficulty that that creates in many other Government Departments?

Mr. Miller: I hope that my response to my hon. Friend does not bring about the demise of some of the people whom I have met during my study of Nuclear Electric, but the one consistent theme has been that the only energy policy that the Government have is to have no energy policy. If that is the message that comes from the heart of an industry that provides about 25 per cent. of our power supply, it does not bode well for the future of the country's energy policy.

Mrs. Gillan: If the hon. Gentleman is so preoccupied with what he perceives to be a lack of balance by Conservative Members, perhaps he would care to outline for the House, especially following the redrafting of clause IV, exactly what the Labour party's energy policies are. Do you intend to take privatised companies back into the state sector, and what are your party's policies vis-à-vis the nuclear review?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I remind the hon. Lady that I am not answering the questions.

Mrs. Gillan: My apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker.

An hon. Member: She might like to.

Mr. Miller: I shall not rise to the bait of asking whether the Office of the Speaker has a policy on energy. To answer the hon. Lady's question, it is obvious that the Labour party envisages a role for a balanced economy in which the private and the public sector will play a role. I think that the hon. Lady invites me to recite the new clause IV, but I think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you might, on a few marginal points, rule me out of order because some of the international aspects of it are not relevant to the debate.

The Minister said that the Bill presents new opportunities and new horizons for the employees. If that is correct, why do the employees—not in information that they have provided to Opposition Members, but in information that they have obviously provided to Conservative Members—express such anxiety? They are less than confident about the new horizons that are described, and it seems to me a little unfair of the Minister to make that comment.

The Minister dodged the issue on Berkeley Technology Centre, which emphasises the fact that his ideas of new horizons and new opportunities float around in his head but have no substance.

The hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), in an intervention, asked what the core business of AEA Technology is. All Members of the House could perhaps agree on one matter—that the core business is based on people, and that the role of people in the industry is very important.

Naturally, the Minister would have great difficulty in defining precisely the core business of the industry because, as his opening speech made clear, the company in its current form has engaged in research and development in a wide spectrum of activities that have stemmed from its original responsibilities to the atomic energy industry, but there have been some remarkable spin-off technologies. Indeed, the hon. Member for South Dorset referred to that.

Given that that is the case, it is extremely difficult to envisage a way in which currently prevailing opinion in British industry will properly manage a people-based organisation that is a science institute in itself, when the overriding dogma of the boardroom today is to dispose of non-core activities. The only solution is for the company in its new form to engage in a proper system of management by objectives.

I have observed, in recent studies, some areas where the proper application of management by objectives has resulted in the reversal of the traditional British boardroom dogma of getting rid of non-core activities. Obviously, there are occasions when some companies may not be best equipped to provide their own canteen services, and therefore dispose of them as a non-core activity to a third-party specialist company. One may accept the logic of that.

However, in a company as complex as AEA Technology, to engage in a debate about what is the core of the business understandably gives rise to the anxieties that employees express at present. As no one can define the core business, no one can define which part of the company will have a safe group of employees in it. Therein lies the problem that gives rise to the major part of the anxiety being expressed by employees.

The hon. Member for Amersham—

Mrs. Gillan: Chesham and Amersham.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), to give the full title, referred in an intervention to the issue of employee participation. I am glad that she did so, but I hope that she noticed that the Minister dodged, in his response, any suggestion that the employees might have full voting stock in such a company, or control of such a company. No; the Minister has fixed ideas about the nature of any flotation and, frankly, I believe that he should have clarified to the House exactly what he meant.

I said that I would refer to some of the comments in the Library brief. There is an interesting observation on page 7 about the history of the position in which we find ourselves today:

"An important development which influenced the proposed privatisation of AEA Technology was the publication, in 1992, of a Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the service provided by the UKAEA."

That was described in a written answer on 13 May 1992. A question was tabled by the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick). I do not know what his interest is in the industry. It was responded to by the then Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). Both hon. Gentlemen have moved on somewhat since that time. The hon. Member for Colne Valley asked the President of the Board of Trade

"when he proposes to publish the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority; and if he will make a statement."

[Mr. Miller]

The hon. Member for Tatton said:

"The report is published today."

That is, 13 May 1992.

"The commission was asked to carry out an extensive inquiry into the efficiency and costs of and the service provided by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority".

It is obvious what the interest of the hon. Member for Colne Valley was on that occasion. It was a planted question.

"The commission reports that it was . . . impressed by the expertise, enthusiasm and dedication of the AEA's staff".—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. *144*]

That is an important issue. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed worry about the effect of the proposals on the confidence and morale of staff, and I think that the Government should have paid heed to the MMC's observations about that before rushing through with their views.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham also gets a mention in the Library brief. It refers to the debate of 21 November 1994, and quotes her as saying:

"I do not want the benefits and the position of the nuclear-related companies strangled by the provisions that might be deemed necessary for their parent industry".—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 422.]

The hon. Lady hit the nail on the head. I suspect that she was not quite thinking in these terms, but it struck me that the parent company in this case is Her Majesty's Government, who seem to be on a self-destruct course in whatever they do. Perhaps they will be strangled rather than any part of this country's science base.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I am flattered that he chose to quote me from an earlier debate on the subject. As to his point about morale, has he visited AEA Technology in the past year to talk to staff about morale and the way in which they are reacting to the proposed privatisation?

Mr. Miller: I shall refer to observations from some of the AEA Technology staff representatives later in my contribution and I hope that the hon. Lady will take note of the serious points that they raise.

The Barclays de Zoete Wedd terms of reference set out a number of points of which the House should take note. It is curious that BZW has been given the task of carrying out a study with incomplete terms of reference. I do not believe that that is the correct way to undertake an objective analysis of the problems perceived by the Government. The BZW terms of reference contain nothing about the impact of any conclusions on publicly funded science. They do not refer to pensions or to the knock-on effect of privatisation for other Government Departments. I shall refer to those points in some detail later in my speech.

The fact that the Government set the terms of reference in order to minimise the costs for the British Government sticks out like a sore thumb. They do not seem to have considered the interests of British science. Hon. Members know—perhaps some better than others—that one of the major problems facing Britain today concerns our nation's failure to convert the fruits of our scientific base into profitable manufactured goods. If one adds to that the attempted destruction of part of our scientific base, one can see how the situation will worsen.

Perhaps the Minister will explain in his winding-up speech why BZW's terms of reference do not require it to analyse the effects of the proposed privatisation on our national research and development and scientific base. That is a major omission. I shall refer to pensions in some detail in a moment. However, I hope that the Minister will also explain why BZW—although not all merchant banker firms have good reputations these days, presumably it has some expertise in managing pensions—did not make any observations to the Government on pensions. Why was that not included in its terms of reference? Was BZW asked to analyse the effects of the proposals on other Government Departments? The Government were interested only in minimising the cost to Her Majesy's Government in achieving their ideological goal of privatisation.

Extensive reference has been made to the problems of decommissioning and, once again, it is a very complex area. There is widespread dispute within the science community about decommissioning, with different factions arguing about the right course to take. Some important activities are going on at the moment. The hon. Member for South Dorset referred to Winfrith and, as the Minister is aware, a couple of other stations are currently in the process of decommissioning.

The complexity of the engineering process—it is not simply a question of dismantling office buildings; it is far more complicated than that—means that there are new engineering and science achievements on a daily basis. I do not think that we are maximising the potential of that exciting spin-off in this country. As hon. Members saw from the exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall a few weeks ago, some extremely exciting engineering developments have emerged from those technologies and there is a world market for them.

The tools that have been devised by Berkeley and similar innovations by the Atomic Energy Authority for accessing the core of active power stations represent quite extraordinary engineering feats. We are undoubtedly ahead of the world market in exploring those technologies. Given the uncertainty of what is happening in terms of the nuclear review and in the context of the legislation, there is a powerful argument for standing still and awaiting the results of the nuclear review. We could then reach a rational decision in the best interests of the exploitation of science and engineering in the long term.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth) *rose—*

Mr. Miller: Although the hon. Gentleman has only just entered the Chamber, I shall give way to him as I know that he has an interest in engineering.

Mr. Deva: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he agree that there is much work to be done in eastern Europe in the decommissioning area and in order to make safe nuclear power plants that have out-of-date technology? We could assist those countries in that task.

Mr. Miller: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to the Minister's speech, he would have heard him praise the work that the Atomic Energy Authority is doing in eastern Europe. However, that valuable work is being done today; there is no evidence that that science and engineering skill will advance any faster under a privatised company. It is happening now while the company is in its present form.

There seem to be a series of problems relating to the pension fund. There are no real guarantees on what will happen after the takeover. One problem is that, whoever the previous owner of a company is, it is extremely difficult for that previous owner to exert any real long-term control over the development of a pension fund after the business has changed hands.

In my previous life I negotiated on major pension fund takeovers, some of which were extremely controversial, such as the merger between GEC and Plessey, the partial sell-off to Siemens and the involvement of Ferranti—very complex pensions issues. It is not reasonable to expect the previous owner of a company to give guarantees in perpetuity. Because of that, the Government have a solution at their disposal—to do precisely what they did with Amersham International and protect the employees by giving them the opportunity to remain within the civil service pension scheme until such time as individuals choose to move out of it. That is what happened with Amersham International.

The Government have changed the rules since then, not because there was any logical pension argument for doing so, but because the Treasury required them to do so. The forward commitments of a pension fund are clearly matters which, under the current Treasury rules, are seen as impinging upon the public sector borrowing requirement and it is clear that the Government have reached that conclusion because their intention is to lower the PSBR and not to look after the best interests of the Atomic Energy Authority work force.

Last year, when the House debated the change to the milk industry—a slightly different industry, but the pension argument remains precisely the same—a similar series of questions were posed in relation to the transfer of the milk marketing board pension scheme to Milk Marque. It is clear that at the time the Government had no adequate answers to the logical comparison that was drawn with Amersham International. There is clearly no logical argument throughout the series of privatisations. The Government could quite simply build in a protection in the interests of the pension fund members, which they claim to hold dear to their heart, by offering them the opportunity to have the same provisions that were available at that time. Obviously, the civil service scheme has moved on, so the actual application would be slightly different, but the principle remains valid.

Why are the Government structuring the Bill in such a way? Why can they not treat the work force in the same way as that of Amersham? It is clear that different groups within Government Departments have different interests in the matter. Even if the Minister were able to convince the House on the merits of the privatisation in the interests of science and of the British economy, I suspect that he would fail to convince his Treasury colleagues on how best to protect the interests of the pension fund members. The Minister must remember that the TUPE regulations did not extend to pension schemes, but the principle can be extended by the will of the parties engaged.

I looked carefully at the paragraphs in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Bill under the heading "Financial Effects". It is interesting that the Government have included phrases that could potentially let them off the hook. The third from last paragraph starts:

"If transferred employees transfer their accrued pension rights in the Authority's pension scheme".

I suppose that the Government could get themselves off the hook by working on the word "if" and changing their mind, without any great embarrassment. It appears that all the Minister has to do is convince his Treasury colleagues of the logic of that proposal.

Reference was made earlier to the role of Sir Anthony Cleaver in the creation of Procord. The Minister, in a blunt intervention, made it clear that Sir Anthony Cleaver had stood away from his responsibilities within AEA when Procord was being created. A statement issued on 7 March makes it quite clear that Sir Anthony must have known an awful lot about the way in which Procord was going to perform in the marketplace and what was being offered by the Government. He is quoted extensively in a press release, in very buoyant terms:

"I am confident that Procord will be an excellent employer".

I wonder whether that view will be held by everyone. He continued:

"and I am sure that FSD staff will find new opportunities as part of a company whose core business is facilities service and management."

The entire press release is very buoyant and seems to reflect a detailed knowledge of the company. One has to draw conclusions from that.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham asked about my knowledge of the industry. She will be aware that Risley is a stone's throw from my house. I can see a large part of the industry from my house. In the past, I had a great deal of contact with people on the Harwell site.

In a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall), whose constituency incorporates a large part of Risley, the staff representatives refer to the UKAEA letter setting out the proposals:

"The UKAEA letter says that they"—

the company—

"are committed to safeguarding terms and conditions of employment for employees in each divestment. However, despite many requests, UKAEA have not offered any agreement on: index-linked pensions security of redundancy payments or protection beyond the legal minimum offered by TUPE."

That is the view of the staff representatives.

One must express concern about the Government's failure to take into account the interests of the employees to the fullest extent. The Minister said that he would give a great deal of weight to management and staff. If he is serious about that, these are the specific points that concern the staff. I put them on the record because they set out some powerful arguments about why the Government need to think again.

I offer the House a series of explanations. First, the Bill is defective because it says nothing about the existing organisation and retention—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham laughs. Is she not interested in the views of the staff?

As I was saying, the Bill says nothing about the organisation and retention of UKAEA under direct Government control, dealing with decommissioning old reactors and safe nuclear waste disposal. That concern has been raised by a number of hon. Members in the debate, although they hold different views about the future of the nuclear industry. Given that that view comes from the heart of an organisation in the industry whose sole core is its people, the Government should take note of that point.

Secondly, the Bill says nothing about AEA Technology being retained as a comprehensive undertaking. The fragmentation of its renowned collective skills and

[Mr. Miller]

expertise would destroy valuable synergy and make it difficult to present for sale. The Bill may become a charter for cherry picking. Given some of the spin-off technologies that have emerged from the business in its current unified state, that is another powerful argument. Some of those spin-off technologies, which have benefited the national health service, for example, are unlikely to emerge if we allow a cherry-picking operation to prevail.

Thirdly, the Government are expected to announce the outcome of the nuclear review very shortly. It is likely that that will have implications for the future of UKAEA. The Bill should not pre-empt those recommendations. I have made that point already and shall not dwell on it.

Fourthly, the Bill would specifically prevent employees' existing pension rights being transferred to the private sector. I stress the word "existing". Proper employment protection, including underwriting of redundancy rights, should be incorporated in the Bill as it was with the recent privatisation of the Atomic Weapons Establishment. I have covered that point as well.

Fifthly and crucially, the Bill leaves wide open options as to how UKAEA is to be split up and AEA Technology might be sold. It could either be kept together or split up in a series of trade sales. There are huge uncertainties about the form of privatisation, which the Bill does not resolve. The Government have yet to clarify the extent to which they would accept a management-employee buy-out. Would they be prepared to allow a scheme whereby management and employees had all the voting stock spread among themselves? The Government need to think carefully about that proposal.

Finally, the Bill gives the Secretary of State powers to reorganise or transfer parts of UKAEA, or to approve such actions, without reference to Parliament. Colleagues on both sides of the House who express concern about what is down the line from the Bill should take careful note of that observation. Parliament should have the power to approve such actions.

The Bill is driven by a one-sided ideology based on the Government's determination to dispose of a jewel in the crown of British science. They do so only because that will provide a few more pennies in the Treasury's coffer.

Mrs. Gillan: I object to the idea that this is one-sided ideology. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that AEA Technology conducted a MORI poll among its customers, 84 per cent. of whom said that privatisation was desirable for AEA Technology?

Mr. Miller: The hon. Lady has a background in marketing and could sell ice-cream to the Eskimos. The simple fact is that two other constituencies matter: first, the work force within the company; and, secondly, Great Britain plc. There has been no analysis of Great Britain's interests nor a specific analysis of the interests of the work force, otherwise the Government would have included those requirements in the terms of reference that they set out to Barclays de Zoete Wedd in the first place.

The one-sided ideology based on the interests of the Treasury, not those of British science or the company's work force, must be addressed again. I invite the Government to think carefully about some of the observations that hon. Members on both sides of the House have made about the genuine concerns that exist. Those concerns are based not on a one-sided ideology on the part of the Opposition that nothing can ever be privatised—I made that clear in my opening remarks—but on a determination that any changes in ownership should first deal with those key points.

7.16 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I support the Bill on principle because, where Government can do so, they should disengage from the management of activities that are essentially commercial and free organisations to go out and seek customers untrammelled by Treasury rules or the risk of political interference, which is inevitable when an industry is part of the state.

I bear in mind Opposition Members' points about the nuclear review but hope that this will be the first stage of greater private sector involvement in the nuclear power industry, which I hope will follow from the results of the review. I hope that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), during his Industry and Parliament Trust fellowship with Nuclear Electric, studied fully the reasons why that company is pushing strongly for its privatisation as soon as possible.

Mr. Miller: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman attended the interesting debate that took place in the Select Committee on Science and Technology a couple of months ago, when the only common ground between John Collier and Greenpeace was their desire to privatise the company. I think that they are both wrong. May I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that I was studying the total quality management systems on which the company is embarking, which could provide some important lessons to the Government? Perhaps some TQM principles should apply to Ministers here.

Mr. Lidington: I was grateful for that response, not least because it showed that, when it comes to privatisation, "one-sided ideology", to use the hon. Gentleman's phrase, seems to be the property of the Labour party, whereas we have a rainbow coalition in support of greater private sector involvement in the nuclear power industry.

I support the Bill in principle and because on the doorstep of my constituency is Amersham International, a successful business employing a number of my constituents. It is an excellent example of a business that is not dissimilar to AEA Technology and that has made a tremendous success of its life in the private sector.

I support the Bill because I see privatisation as the best way to secure customers and, therefore, the jobs of the workers who, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have agreed, are the mainstay of AEA Technology's reputation and expertise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) drew attention to the diminishing customer base of the domestic nuclear industry. The reports and accounts of AEAT highlight the new commercial world within which the business is having to operate. In 1991-92, for example, the company's sales to overseas customers amounted to £43.7 million. Two years later, the total had risen to £66.5 million. The story is similar for AEAT's sales to United Kingdom private sector enterprises. In 1991-92, some £40.5 million worth of sales were made. In 1993-94, the figure was £63.5 million. It is the private sector and

foreign markets for the ancillary services, which were originally developed as a sideline to the main nuclear business, on which the future of the company and, therefore, the security of the jobs of its employees will increasingly come to depend. It seems to me that we have a real prize in AEAT. We have an enterprise that is forging a lead in some of the technologies and services that will be in great demand throughout international markets in the decades ahead.

Reference was made earlier—I think by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva)—to the work that is already being done by AEAT in helping to clean up the environmental devastation in eastern and central Europe, wrought by a socialist energy policy, which operated there for many years. AEAT, we know, is already actively involved in Slovakia and has contributed to the work of making good the devastation wrought by the Chernobyl disaster.

We must look globally at the future nuclear business of AEAT and not confine ourselves to discussion of the future of the United Kingdom nuclear market. I do not believe that developing countries will be able to deliver to their populations the standard of living that those people rightly want to see without using an increasing amount of nuclear power as well as power generated by the burning of fossil fuels. We see from recent reports that China is now either planning or is building 24 new nuclear reactors. In Japan, the institute of energy economics has predicted that Japan will need a significantly larger nuclear capacity if it is to succeed in its declared objective and, indeed, its treaty commitment, of curbing carbon dioxide emissions to their 1990 level.

There are international nuclear markets for AEAT to go out and win, and I do not think that we should be so pessimistic as to assume that the fate of the elderly reactors left with the remnants of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority is the sole determinant of the business for the future. Freed to go into the private sector, I have every confidence that AEAT will be able to go out and win that international nuclear business for this country.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The hon. Gentleman has just reminded me that I was thinking about watching "The Simpsons" on Sky Television, which of course is an American programme. Homer works in a private nuclear power station, and we see the disasters that happen from time to time. Does the hon. Gentleman envisage that happening in this country?

Mr. Lidington: I think that the whole House is grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his explanation of new Labour's energy policy for the future of this country. He has probably come about as near to it as his Front Bench representatives did this afternoon.

There are other important markets in which AEAT will be able to seek customers. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) referred to the descaling of oil and gas pipelines. That was developed initially as an ancillary service to the nuclear business, and there are a number of ways in which AEAT is already involving itself in the oil and gas industry. That, again, is an area that seems to offer considerable scope for business development in the future.

There will be opportunities in oil reservoir management. The company has already developed computer models to examine how oil and water flow through a well drilled in a particular geology, and such as service is of real commercial benefit to oil companies in helping them to determine how best to go about exploiting the hydrocarbons that their geologists find in a particular field.

Mr. Miller: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such technology, which has no direct connection with the atomic energy industry, emerged as a spin-off resulting from the diversity of the activities in AEAT? Does he not agree that there are risks that the potential for such exciting future technology will be damaged if there is a cherry-picking operation?

Mr. Lidington: Although I have not studied the subject in detail, and I found the argument made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage compelling, when the Government decide on the mode of privatisation they will wish to consider that argument carefully. The key consideration is that once AEAT is in the private sector there will be a commercial incentive for the board and for the management to seek out those opportunities wherever they arise, rather than to wait for them somehow to be handed down by departmental initiative.

Environmental services are another enterprise in which there is scope for new development. I have seen an estimate—I think it was published by AEAT—that there are some 60,000 tonnes of toxic munitions on the bed of the Baltic sea alone. I know that the company feels that it can become involved in the clearing up of chemical wastes, including chemical munitions. It is already involved in the removal of particulates from diesel exhausts, and that is bound to be a growing market. At the moment, quite rightly, there is much concern in the developed world, where we already enjoy a high material standard of living, that the drive to greater prosperity in the Pacific rim and Latin America will bring in its wake great environmental problems. But the peoples of those countries, as they achieve a higher material standard of living, will also want a better quality of life, and therefore there will be a demand from newly developing countries for environmental services of the sort that AEAT will have to offer. Again, that is not something for Governments to seek out. It is not for Governments to direct companies as to how they should find new business opportunities. That opportunity will come from boards and managers looking for customers wherever they can find them in different parts of the world.

Earlier we had an illustration of what my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage called the schizophrenia of the modern Labour party. On the one hand, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, the very image of new Labour, who took pride in saying that he had no fixed ideology and who I am sure sat up all last night committing to memory the new text of clause IV and would qualify as one of the pink guards of the cultural revolution going through the Labour party at the moment, admitted—I am sure that those on the Opposition Front Bench closed their ears at this moment—that at least he had seen the merits of greater private sector involvement in at least some areas of activity of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys which had hitherto been entirely the property of the state sector.

Earlier the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) not only attacked the privatisation measures in the Bill but raised before us in a nostalgic vision a shade of Lord Kearton himself, harking back to the elysian days of

[Mr. Lidington]

BNOC and a majority Government shareholding in BP. The hon. Gentleman is no longer with us. He has probably been summoned for a self-criticism session in Islington even as we speak.

Sometimes I wonder where Opposition Members have been. It is partly a question of Treasury rules; it is partly a fact of life that state-owned businesses are either given an unfair subsidy by the Government of the day—in effect, underwritten by the Government to the disadvantage of private sector competitors—or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) pointed out, they are always last in the queue behind the politically attractive priorities of health, schools and pensions.

There is also the wider question of political interference. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy was somewhat dismissive of BP. He said that it was fine when there was a majority state shareholding in it, but companies that have a state shareholding, particularly a majority one, are inevitably subject to the risk—

Mr. Miller: When was the last occasion that the President of the Board of Trade interfered in the running of BNFL?

Mr. Lidington: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be prepared to answer that question if the hon. Gentleman wishes to put it to him. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was listening to what I was saying. I was talking about the risk of political interference.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a recent example of that, which the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) clearly did not know about because he refused to answer the question that I put to him, and that is when the Central Statistical Office put BNFL accounts back into the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend puts his point well. The risk of political interference, whether it is to do with the siting of particular operations or investment decisions is there all the time, but so too is the risk of retaliation by a foreign Government that happens to disagree with the policies being pursued by the British Government of the day. It is impossible completely to insulate British companies from unjustified retaliation taken for political motives, but the risk is bound to be greater where a company is not seen to be based in a particular country and when the majority of its shares are owned by the Government with which the foreign Government is in dispute.

Through privatisation we shall ensure not just the survival of AEA Technology but the security of the jobs of those workers whose interests hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to protect today, and through privatisation we will ensure the developing prosperity of AEA Technology to the benefit of its employees and shareholders and of the nation.

7.34 pm

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): First, I pay tribute to previous speakers, particularly the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) who gave an excellent resumé of the matter. If the Bill were not quite so spurious, it would have been a speech well worth hearing at another time.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who found himself with a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the Bill. It is becoming clear why that should be so. The Bill is not about the science base or the development of technology but about finance and political expediency, and it is the worse for that.

Not that a Bill should necessarily be troubled by the juxtaposition of finance and politics. They are not mutually exclusive ideas. They are often important to the development of a Bill by which we intend to achieve a certain aim. In this instance, both those matters have been rushed and insufficient thought has been given to the Bill.

In support of my view that the Bill is neither about science nor about the development of technology but about finance and politics, I quote the evidence of the Institute of Professionals, Managers and Specialists to the Select Committee on Science and Technology on the proposed privatisation. It said:

"Firstly, it will remove from government a major pool of expertise on nuclear and other energy matters other than those related to decommissioning.

Secondly, there is a risk of early business failure for the privatised part of AEA, which would cause extra cost and difficulty for the Government. This is because increasing profit projections for Commercial Division rely on exploitation of monopoly situations that currently exist, for example in the areas of decommissioning and waste management. Without the guarantee of long term Government contracts after flotation, the future of the Division would be at risk. In addition many of the potentially commercial activities assigned to the Commercial Division risk failure since they are based on synergies with part of Government Division that would no longer be available to them."

I take that as an opening statement because it has a profound impact on the Bill.

The origins of the AEA, about which we heard much earlier, were in the depths of 1954 when, notwithstanding that a Conservative Government were in power, wiser counsels prevailed than today, when the Government are bent on unravelling the work which was put in place then and for which we have all had reason to be exceedingly grateful over many years.

My interest is clear. Hon. Members have been anxious to tell the House that they represent constituencies where activities related to the AEA are taking place, but I come from a west midlands seat, Wolverhampton, North-East, where we are totally dependent on the development of science, engineering and new technologies to earn our daily living. Without it, we will fade; indeed, we have already faded because of the underfunding of science, particularly "blue skies" science, and shortage of money for market opportunities.

Harold Macmillan was part of the Government in 1954, and subsequently became Prime Minister. When he retired from the House of Commons, he became a member of the other place. Speaking in his former constituency of Stockton, at a time of earlier privatisations, he used a phrase that is now embedded in the consciousness of the British public: he said that we were "selling the family silver". *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) wishes to intervene, he may. It is entirely a matter for him.

Although Harold Macmillan was referring to another privatisation at that time, his words are now etched in our consciousness, and we have reason to understand them

increasingly as each day passes—not least the recent fiascos involving the electricity industry. As I have said, however, wiser counsels prevailed in earlier days, and current developments are a travesty of what was then considered to be the right course for Britain to take.

In recent years, the AEA has deliberately separated its nuclear from its non-nuclear work in preparation for privatisation. Of course we knew that the separation was coming—it was almost a sucker punch—but it has happened by default none the less. AEA Technology has already divested itself of much of its work; much of it has been privatised. For some years, the management of the AEA have made no secret of their desire for the organisation to be privatised, but I wonder how much that has to do with the gravy train rather than what is good for the industry.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: My hon. Friend is dealing with an important subject. I joked earlier about Homer Simpson and his power station, but let me point out in all sincerity that many nuclear disasters have taken place in America and Russia, including Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. The private sector may not be able to exercise the necessary controls. There are serious ecological considerations. Given the general fear of nuclear disasters and all the safety hazards, should we be pushing nuclear power into the private sector now? I think that there is a long way to go before we get this right.

Mr. Purchase: My hon. Friend has made a good point, although I did not realise that he was joking when he referred to the debacle surrounding the Simpsons. As he says, much of the delay involving the Bill—which, of course, is still not timely—is due to the complexity of the process of separating a unitary body into two parts, one of which is to be sold. We do not know the nature of that sale; we do not know what route the Government will take. There is a hole at the heart of the Bill, to which others have referred. Indeed, the Conservative Members to whom I referred earlier spoke at length about the problems involved in the type of sell-off that will ultimately take place. Only when those complex problems are disaggregated can the sale proceed.

As I have said, parts of the AEA have already been privatised. Job losses have continued—surprise, surprise. Have not job losses always been the prelude to the privatisation of every industry? The aim has been not necessarily to put the company concerned into a better state but to put it into a better state in which it can be sold. The state has already met the redundancy costs; price rises have been allowed beyond inflation; the pig has been fattened for sale. That is a simple, straightforward policy that we could all understand. I suspect that the current position is no different. The Government introduced the Bill because they failed to persuade the House and the country that they could privatise the Post Office: there can be no other reason.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: In the 1960s, the AEA's forerunner employed 40,000 people. The rundown in the number of employees happened long before the present privatisation—and, indeed, company splits took place then as well.

Mr. Purchase: The hon. Gentleman makes his point well. Of course that was a much larger organisation, fitted for a very different time. We are now dealing with the short term, however, rather than the long term to which the hon. Gentleman reasonably refers—and in the short term the Government are determined to bring a privatisation to fruition. They want the money, and we know why: according to the *Financial Times*, AEA Technology is valued at some £200 million, although that will depend on how the sale takes place. It also has a work force of some 4,000. Oddly enough, the organisation's sales also amount to around £200 million per annum. I readily concede that the position is now very different.

The proposal was inserted into the Queen's Speech at the 11th hour and the 59th minute, because the Government had lost what they regarded as the jewel in their crown—the sale of the Post Office. Having interviewed the chairman and chief executive of the Post Office in a Select Committee, I can tell the House that they are bitterly disappointed men—almost, but not quite, as disappointed as the President of the Board of Trade. Their opportunity to achieve millionaire status had been taken away at the last second. They have a right to be disappointed, but they do not have a right to our money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman should not go too far down that path. We are not discussing the privatisation of the Post Office; we are discussing the Atomic Energy Authority Bill.

Mr. Purchase: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

By modern standards, AEA Technology is quite a large company. Conservative Members have asked what Labour's policies are; I can tell them that our policy in regard to companies of this kind is to ensure that they prosper and contribute fully to the development of the British economy. We believe that AEA Technology could remain in the public sector and continue to make its contribution.

We heard earlier about the corset that Treasury rules tend to impose on opportunities for cash raising, but those arguments are spurious. It is within the gift of the Treasury and the Conservative party to change the rules if they so wish. They can do that at any time. The old arguments that we used to hear about public investment crowding out private investment have proven to be worthless. International capitalism is looking for a home for its money. *[Interruption.]* Who knows, the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) may rise in a moment. Spring is arriving and the sap is rising too. I think that he is waiting for the opportunity.

The Government have the opportunity to change the rules, if they wish, in a satisfactory way. Money could be raised for this important enterprise, which belongs to the nation and is in democratic ownership. The benefits accrue to the nation. While it is in our control, we have the right to deal with it and to use it to benefit industry, commerce and every other sector that depends on the lifeblood of innovation and invention. Those are the stakes that we are discussing. I agree that this privatisation is not on the scale of the Post Office or water industry privatisations, but it is of that importance.

The Bill does not set up a new company which could then be sold off, with money being put into the Consolidated Fund. It talks about schemes. Other hon. Members have referred to the fact that the Bill offers no real understanding of just how the company will be privatised. We look forward to, and would welcome, an

[Mr. Purchase]

answer on that. Unquestionably, the Committee's work will be hindered unless the basis on which the company will be privatised is understood.

After the schemes comes the possibility of disposals, which can take place without further reference to Parliament. Who knows, the companies or company, whichever it might be—we know not—could then be split into small parts. A typical trick employed in the market is to gather a company, to strip its assets and to sell it off.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I shall not talk about Homer Simpson again. My hon. Friend has got on to an important subject. In relation to the electricity industry, Trafalgar House has just tried to take Northern Electric to the cleaners. The regulator said he was having none of it. I wonder how that relates to the nuclear industry. Once it has been privatised, foreign companies might want to take its assets and use them in the same way as the Americans in "The Simpsons" on Sky Television.

Mr. Purchase: My hon. Friend makes a series of good points. I may have preferred them one at a time, but I had the lot together. We should especially recognise the real probability of AEA Technology, in whichever form it exists, being split up in the way that he suggests, and being owned by people who have no loyalty to this country. One must not think that they have that. We are patriots. Hon. Members in this Chamber believe that, first and foremost, we are interested in British interests. Of course we recognise that we cannot exist simply as an island in every sense of word. We must depend and co-operate worldwide; none the less, all our efforts should be directed towards the interests of the people whom we represent, no matter how much that depends on our international diplomacy and the work that we undertake.

Let me give a specific example to my hon. Friend of the way in which the Government have acted. I have mentioned the super-highway. I hope that you will allow me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to proceed with that subject for a moment. The Government plan to allow the super-highway to be built by anyone except British Telecom and Mercury Communications. Their reason was that those two companies—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am tolerant tonight—I have felt in that mood so far—but the hon. Gentleman promised earlier that he would discuss the Bill. I hope that he will now do so.

Mr. Purchase: I shall, of course, do as you wish, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I owed a little debt to my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), who had intervened. It may be inappropriate to talk about the way in which the super-highway has been constructed and about the fact that all the companies are American, but I am sure that you would let me make that point that the same thing could happen because of the Bill.

Under this measure, the technology, science, engineering and development sectors could end up in foreign hands. I do not say that as a xenophobe. Whatever the form of privatisation, it is important that we can keep control of what happens in the interests of the experienced, skilled and scientific employees in the industry.

You are not insisting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I should return to the Bill, but I do so voluntarily. It states:

"Clause 10 provides for a reduction in the minimum number of members of the Authority".

It removes the requirement that a certain minimum number of members should have relevant experience. That speaks volumes. I am not privy to Government thinking, but the general public will think that that paves the way for yet more political appointees to yet another quango. If the need for technical and relevant expertise is removed, one must seriously probe and question the Government about what they have in mind in relationship to membership of the body. I say that without malice. I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us, and to tell us what he understands clause 10 to mean and what his intentions are. I am sure that they are honourable, but the House is entitled to know what is in his mind.

There are issues that must be dealt with. The principles that the Government have used are the usual ones about the need for organisations to have freedom to manage their own affairs and to make the most of commercial opportunities. That is a spurious argument. The company can do all of those things right now. It simply needs the Government to accept that it is possible and sensible to keep it in the public domain and, at the same time, to allow the desirable objectives that I have mentioned.

After any sale, the Government may be left with a part of AEA Technology that requires constant public funding over many years, certainly until the completion of the decommissioning of nuclear assets. It is reasonable for the state to recognise that complementary sectors exist in a unitary body. They are part of the same asset base. We can ensure that the total cost of the activities, especially of decommissioning, is partly offset by the profitable activity of another sector of the company. It is reasonable to keep that critical mass—a scientific term that has been ripped off by the business management community and is now part of its jargon. That critical mass is exceedingly important if the company is to remain as a unitary body rather than one that is divided and is, therefore, weaker.

I hear talk about the form that privatisation will take. Rather than take a single cash sum from the sale, which would then go into the Consolidated Fund, the revenue stream from AEA Technology should be used to continue to contribute towards, for instance, decommissioning costs. More than that, it could be used to reinvest and invest again in the development of research expertise in the nation's interests.

On technology transfer and innovation the *Financial Times* said:

"AEA contains a high class, probably unique, amalgam of expertise, which can be marketed to a wide range of companies."

The value of this company is expressed almost exclusively through the people who work for it; unless the Government find a way to keep that body of people together, it will be a pig in a poke, it will be worthless. That has to be at the centre of our thinking.

The AEA is a flagship organisation. It plays a key role in United Kingdom technological development. We have already mentioned environmental technology, which is a growing area of concern the world over. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), who is no longer in his place, made a sensible intervention and talked about the need for decommissioning in the former Soviet Union countries and the safe disposal of the nuclear and hazardous waste that has accumulated over

many years. The whole aspect of environmental pollution controls is coming closer to the centre of the agenda for business development. In western Europe and north America the issue of emissions is critical to the future of the planet. Here we are with the opportunity to make a head start with this body, but we are throwing it away carelessly without thought for what will happen.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: My mind is starting to boggle. My hon. Friend has been talking about the privatisation of the nuclear industry. Does he agree that the private sector is liable to take shortcuts on safety in the nuclear industry which would cause great danger to the areas in which the nuclear power stations are located? It will be frightening for those who live around them. Three Mile Island has already been mentioned and that is just one example. Is it not of great concern that the Government are not prepared to keep hold of the industry and develop it? Nobody is denying that the industry needs to be developed, but to give it away to private industry at this late stage is wrong.

Mr. Purchase: As ever, my hon. Friend has made a relevant intervention. That is another danger implicit in the Bill and it has been referred to by Conservative Members who have questioned whether the Treasury will relax the rules so that the company will be able to obtain the necessary investment.

One of the things that plagues the development of companies in this country is short-termism, which typifies so much of the work in the City and which has been to the detriment of our small, medium and even larger companies. Short-termism means that companies have to go to the market for money and have to show dividends that are out of kilter with the company's activities in order to satisfy their shareholders so that they will continue to hold the stock. That is a serious danger of privatising the AEA. Rather than an ordered, planned and proper approach to this important company, a scramble will take place and shares and the dividends paid upon them will become the only important matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley was right to make his point and I believe that it has been understood by many hon. Members.

The hole in the heart of the Bill is the form of sale. We must know what form it will take. The work of the Standing Committee will be in a vacuum. It cannot be constructive unless we have something around which we can discuss, probe and test in the best traditions of the Opposition. There are many Conservative Members who would want to know that before setting foot in the Committee.

I do not feel that it is necessary to rehearse again the arguments about pension rights, because there will be another opportunity to do that. However, it is important and my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) spoke about it at some length. Many trade unionists and ordinary workers will be concerned about the way in which employment rights are expressed in the Bill. The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 apply to the employment rights and we hope that the Government will make it clear that they will honour those regulations properly.

This is a hasty and ill-thought-out Bill. It has no regard for the United Kingdom's science base. It is a hole in the heart and an example of political and financial expediency at its worst.

8.5 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I extend a welcome to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. This is the first opportunity I have had to congratulate him on his new appointment. We served as officers on the Back-Bench Trade and Industry Committee for some time and I know that he brings to the House and the Department a wealth of knowledge and experience.

While there is another brief appearance of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), I apologise for not being in the House during his opening speech. I had told him that I needed to be out of the Chamber at a Select Committee, but I should like to put on record the fact that I was extremely sad to have missed his contribution.

We have heard some interesting speeches and I congratulate my hon. Friends on the contributions that they have made. However, I must confess to being rather sad at the doom and gloom that has been echoed in all the speeches from Opposition Members. I had expected a welcome for the Bill, but the speeches have only made up in length for what they lack in depth.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) said that he can see the site of AEA Technology from his bedroom window. However, I was left unsure as to whether he had actually visited the premises. No doubt he will let me know later. He can rest assured that, during the privatisation, from his bedroom window he will be able to look at a company being developed and set free from the shackles of Government. I am delighted to welcome this Bill, which is long overdue.

This is the first step towards releasing the remaining shackles that were imposed by the Treasury on a group of individuals whose talent and capabilities have grown out of the development of nuclear power. This privatisation will be the second successful operation to spin off from our original investment in the nuclear industry. The first was Amersham International, which I am sure that hon. Members know is based in my constituency. Amersham International has set a pace that I hope AEA Technology will match. Developing as they do from UKAEA, they both represent a commercial payback for this country from our investment in science and fundamental research.

Some of the speeches have left doubt in the minds of those outside who listen to these debates who may believe AEAT to be part of the nuclear power industry. AEA Technology is not a nuclear energy business, although it builds its expertise and reputation by servicing the nuclear industry, among others. Today, only about half AEA Technology's revenue comes from customers in the nuclear industry and it does not own any nuclear facilities or generate electricity. Some speeches have not made that absolutely clear. AEA Technology's own vision is to become a UK flagship science and engineering services business, creating a strong new British competitor in world markets and delivering—

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gillan: By all means.

Mr. Campbell: Can we take it as sure that that company will not be buying shares in the privatised nuclear industry?

Mrs. Gillan: I am not sure that I understand that intervention. As I did not hear or understand it, I think that I better pass over it.

[Mrs. Gillan]

I was saying that AEA Technology has a vision which I think that every hon. Member should endorse. It wants to be a flagship science and engineering services business, creating a strong, new British competitor in world markets and delivering a competitive edge to all its customers. I am sure that that stated aim is welcome.

Since privatisation in 1982, the business of the first flagship science company in this field, Amersham International, has grown more than sixfold. Its turnover has risen from £48.5 million in 1980, the year before privatisation, to £324.2 million last year and the company's profit before tax has grown even more significantly from £4.1 million to £43.5 million—almost 10-fold. I hope that hon. Members will listen to that and understand the success of Amersham International as proof that privatisation has truly worked.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will my hon. Friend make sure that she has her facts entirely right? I recall that, in the early 1980s, Labour Members were moaning and groaning about the privatisation of Amersham International and suggesting that it was going to be a disaster. Can it really be such a success story in view of what Labour Members said 10 or 14 years ago?

Mrs. Gillan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Labour Members were opposed to the privatisation of Amersham International. I shall repeat its success. Amersham's turnover rose from £48.5 million in 1980 to £324.2 million last year.

From reports of his speech, I understand that the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy is especially concerned about the erosion of the science base and the reduction in the number of employees. Perhaps he would like to know that the number of staff of Amersham International has grown from some 2,000 employees in 1980-81 to just under 3,500 in 1993-94. The measure of Amersham International's success may be seen in the fact that more than half its staff are employed overseas, where it does almost 90 per cent. of its business, making the company one of the country's top overseas earners. It contributes more from overseas earnings than the whole of the rest of the British nuclear industry. The rigours of open international competition, when compared with the task of a public utility addressing a domestic market, makes that achievement even more remarkable.

Amersham International has founded its commercial success on applying its scientific and technical expertise in health care and fundamental research into the processes of life. The company's products have significantly enhanced the ability of the medical community worldwide to diagnose brain disease and heart disease and have brought relief to many thousands of sufferers of certain forms of cancer. Those applications provide the most dramatic evidence of the benefits of nuclear medicine arising from the application of very small amounts of short-lived radioactivity at molecular and cellular level. The nuclear industry is often seen as exclusively connected with power generation and, in earlier days, weapons. Amersham International's achievement should remind us that there is a third sector to the industry which has applied fundamental understanding of nuclear science to products and methodologies of outstanding social benefit and commercial success.

This sector of applying such fundamental skills is new and deserving of every encouragement from all hon. Members. We on the Conservative Benches have every confidence that AEA Technology will demonstrate the same success as Amersham International. I hope that Opposition Members will also demonstrate their confidence in AEA Technology to work more in industrial applications, but essentially to apply its depth of skill and expertise.

Privatisation will give AEA Technology a clear commercial remit and submit it to the discipline of the market place. To meet that challenge, it must be able to operate from a secure platform and in a predictable political and regulatory climate. As I have said in previous speeches on the subject, it will need to demonstrate to potential investors that the sector that it is joining is secure from maverick political pressure, which may affect lines of supply, freedom of international trade, and the ability to attract investment and secure publicly acceptable disposal routes for waste. The Government are currently reviewing many of those areas, as hon. Members have said. I see this as an opportunity to ensure that Amersham International and the newly privatised AEA Technology are founded in an atmosphere not of over-regulation but of cautious regulation.

I am fortunate enough, unlike the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, who can only see it from his bedroom window, to have visited AEA Technology in the past year to see at first hand some of its work. Its existing worldwide markets are very impressive and we have heard a long list of what they cover, including aerospace, defence, electricity, health and safety, the oil and gas industry, the pharmaceutical industry and research laboratories. Indeed, its skills base is almost as impressive as the markets that it serves and I shall highlight some of the projects in which it has been involved to show the variety of the organisation.

AEA Technology is often the first port of call for expertise in a crisis. When the oil tanker the MV Braer broke up on the coast of the Shetland islands, AEA Technology teams were called in to advise on oil spillage control and the use of dispersants. Local authorities frequently turn to AEA Technology to support fire and other emergency services at major accidents involving toxic chemicals or hazardous cargoes. It was perhaps not highlighted enough, but following the Piper Alpha accident in the North sea, AEA Technology became the leading consultancy contractor in helping offshore operators with health and safety. It quickly saw a market and set up a company in the Netherlands to serve the Dutch sector, where, incidentally, it now leads the field.

Safety, economy and environmental impact studies are also in the company's remit. Several major safety assessment studies have been carried out for London Underground and British Rail, including a project which is of particular importance to my constituency, the crossrail project. I very much hope, on behalf of my constituents in Chesham and Amersham, that crossrail will not be another project that is consigned to the dustbin of history and that we shall press forward with it as soon as possible.

I have been reading AEA Technology's research highlights and it appears that diamonds are not just a girl's best friend, but have been used in some of the company's front-edge technology and research and development work. The surface sciences and the diamond-like carbon

coatings give a tremendous performance showing an order of magnitude less wear. That technology is of special significance to hip replacements.

Dr. Moonie *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Gillan: I see that the hon. Gentleman is familiar with that exciting innovation. It will alleviate much pain and suffering.

AEA Technology has also reacted well to international markets. As we have heard, it has extensive offices in the United States, Slovakia, Korea, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Japan. Indeed, two employees were seconded to Japan to Dodwell and Co., under the excellent "Engineers to Japan" scheme. The scheme has been much understated. It is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and administered by the Royal Academy of Engineering. The DTI funds up to 50 per cent. of the total cost of secondment up to a maximum of £35,000. AEA Technology and two of its employees have taken full advantage of the scheme. They have made significant breakthroughs and they have improved contacts and sales in the Japanese market.

The international dimension of AEA's business leads me naturally on to space, an area in which, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy, the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), appreciates, I take a particular interest. Space is an area of increasing international co-operation. It is, perhaps, not surprising that AEA Technology can make an important contribution to space technology as both nuclear and space activities take place in a hostile environment involving radiation problems. While on the subject of space, we can see plenty of space on the Opposition Benches at the moment.

Since 1972, AEA's European space tribology laboratory at Risley has been the European Space Agency's laboratory for friction, wear and lubrication problems, serving all space industries in Europe. It has an unrivalled reputation as a centre of excellence for its capabilities, services and products. Similarly, the nuclear fusion work carried out at the Culham laboratory has established a leading expertise in radio frequencies and particle beam technology. Those capabilities are being used for spacecraft antennae and for the development of the next generation of environmental and earth observation satellites.

The AEA Technology portfolio ranges from research and development and consultancy right through to the manufacture of flight hardware and the provision of testing facilities for industry. Its customer base here is both civil and military. It has customers not only in the United Kingdom, but in Europe and elsewhere. Its customers include NASA—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—the Department of Defense and United States aerospace companies.

We should all support international co-operation in space, not least today when, following in the footsteps of our own astronaut Helen Sharman who went to the Russian space station Mir, we have seen the successful launch of the 18th mission to Mir, carrying for the first time an American astronaut who will spend three months on the station.

All United Kingdom space industries are in the private sector. Surely it is appropriate that the capabilities of AEA Technology should join them.

I intervened earlier to speak about the growing reputation of AEA Technology and about the fact that there are demands for its privatisation from another source. AEA Technology employed MORI to research customer attitudes. The findings were extremely positive. First, MORI found that AEA Technology was the highest-rated company in its sector. Secondly, 84 per cent. of customers welcomed privatisation. Thirdly, more than 58 per cent. thought that it would improve the service. An overwhelming majority of customers think that AEA Technology performs at least as well as its main competitors.

Dr. Moonie: I have listened to the hon. Lady's speech with great interest. Does she place the same cachet on the latest MORI poll which shows the Labour party on 58 per cent. and her own party on 20 per cent.?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should not be led in that direction.

Mrs. Gillan: I rely on your good taste and advice on every occasion, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall treat that intervention with the response that it deserves—silence.

Much has been made by Opposition Members of the position of employees. The impression has been given that we care not for employees or staff—or the workers, as one of my hon. Friends called the people who are employed at AEA Technology. AEA Technology not only recognises the quality and commitment of its staff, but realises that the staff are one of its greatest assets. The terms and conditions of employment will be safeguarded under the TUPE—Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—which means that the staff will transfer with their current pay and conditions, and that redundancy rights will be protected.

The Bill places a duty on the Secretary of State and on AEA to ensure that employees can join a pension scheme on privatisation which, taken as a whole, is no less favourable than the AEA scheme. Employees will be free to leave any accrued rights in the AEA pension scheme. They will, therefore, continue to benefit from the full index-linked pension. Existing pensioners and the pensions of staff who remain in the AEA will not be affected. That is my understanding and I believe that it is also the understanding of AEA Technology.

As for employee participation, although it is the decision of the Department of Trade and Industry, it will be AEA Technology's policy to seek to maximise initial and subsequent employee share ownership in the company after privatisation, including encouraging every employee to own at least a minimum number of shares, by operating a share option scheme that is equitable on the basis of length of service, contribution to the business and personal productivity. A committee will be formed to advise on extending employee share ownership. It will publish at the time of the annual report a full list of the number of shares and the number of options owned by every director. That is an excellent commitment.

I was delighted when my Government put their money where their mouth was and created the Office of Public Service and Science. We have heard from the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston and I hope that we shall soon here from the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). Like me, they are members of the Select Committee on Science and Technology. During our first year, we looked at the White Paper "Realising our

[Mrs. Gillan]

Potential" and at the crucial signpost from that White Paper, the foresight programme. One of the programme's aims was to help the business community to secure the maximum benefit from science and technology while continuing to support excellence in research.

These steps towards liberating AEA Technology should be widely welcomed by politicians, by business men and by our community of scientists, as I know they are by AEA Technology. The Bill fulfils one of the aims set out originally in "Realising our Potential". I have no hesitation, therefore, in commending the Bill to the House.

8.26 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I apologise for my late arrival; I was unavoidably detained outside the House. I am afraid that I missed the Minister's speech, for which I apologise.

I am one of the many Labour Members who believe that power, wealth and opportunity should be in the hands of the many and not the few. One of the reasons why many of us oppose these privatisations is that we sincerely believe that that is a fundamental belief of the Labour party. I hope that we shall soon see that belief officially written into our constitution.

I intervened earlier to comment on the complete lack of a Government energy policy. I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) agreed with me on that occasion. I should also draw attention to the complete lack of Government policy on public sector research establishments. The Government have not even begun to try to answer very important questions such as what the establishments are for, what their role is and what they are expected to do that the private sector cannot achieve. Instead, the Government have progressed with a policy that has involved privatisation, stripping the establishments down, selling them off and generally debilitating and rationalising them in a way that has been extremely damaging.

The issue was first pointed out in the science White Paper, "Realising our potential". It is an important indicator of the way in which the Government have subsequently behaved. The White Paper says:

"The Government believes that many of the services currently provided by its research establishments could be carried out in the private sector, and that privatisation is a realistic prospect for a number of establishments. However, there are other establishments for which privatisation is not currently a realistic option. Where establishments are to remain, for the time being, in the public sector, the Government will ensure that customers are provided with a high-quality service in a way that represents best value for money. Careful consideration will need to be given to holding the level of any such capacity to the minimum necessary to meet Government's statutory responsibilities and other essential requirements."

Since then, there have been several reviews. The DTI has suggested that several of its laboratories be privatised. There has also been the Government's efficiency scrutiny of the public sector research establishments, which was supposed to examine those establishments and find out whether any were suitable for privatisation. The recommendations were published, but so far the Government have not said whether they will accept them. We have been waiting a long time, and I suspect that the report will be quietly dropped because of the hostile reaction not only of the House of Commons Select Committee but of the House of Lords Select Committee and of other respected bodies such as the Royal Society.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) told the House earlier why AEA privatisation had cropped up at this particular time. Many outside observers were greatly surprised that it was mentioned in the Queen's Speech last November, but it was obvious to the Opposition why that happened. The Government needed a last-minute suggestion because the Labour party ran a successful campaign against Post Office privatisation and so they could not proceed with that. I shall not pursue that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I know that you will rightly stop me if I try, but it is worth pointing out that that is the only reason why AEA privatisation is before us now.

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) said that he had a constituency interest, and expressed concern about the employment opportunities for the people who work for AEA Technology. Indeed, when the Government published the preview to the efficiency scrutiny of the public sector research establishments AEAT employed 7,000 people, but today that number has fallen to 4,100. In the run-up to privatisation there has been a vast rationalisation and a great reduction in staff numbers, and I understand that AEA plans to cut its staff even further, by one sixth, after privatisation.

Some of my hon. Friends may be rather disappointed that the redrafted clause IV of the Labour party's constitution does not mention full employment, but it does refer to giving people the opportunity to work. Clearly Conservative Members do not believe in that. Time and again, staff numbers are reduced and jobs lost, and people with great expertise and skills find that those qualities are no longer valued or used in the public sector. One could describe the Government philosophy as, "Strip it down, sack most of the staff, then sell it off"—and that epitomises exactly what is happening to AEAT. The civil service union, the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists, has said that the only way in which the Government can increase profits at speed is to sack the people who have made the business successful. That is precisely what is happening at AEAT.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have described at length what AEAT is all about, and I do not intend to repeat what they have said, but it is worth pointing out that it was set up under the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1954 to

"produce, use and dispose of atomic energy and carry out research into any matters connected therewith".

In recent years, in preparation for privatisation, the nuclear and the non-nuclear work have been separated and three divisions have been created—AEA Technology, the UKAEA Government division, which manages the AEA's nuclear liabilities, and the services division, which is being contracted out to the private sector.

If AEA Technology is privatised it will be one of the largest private sector engineering and science consultancies not just in this country but in the world. I want to talk about its previous history, especially the merger with the Warren Spring laboratory, which became part of the national environmental technology centre, which is now part of AEAT.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston was asked several times whether he had visited a laboratory. I visit as many Government laboratories as I

can, and I spend much time visiting science and technology organisations and institutions not only in my constituency but in other parts of the country. However, when my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) and I wished to visit Warren Spring laboratory before it was closed we were firmly given the thumbs down by the President of the Board of Trade, who refused to allow us to visit it unless we were accompanied by a Minister. It proved difficult to find a time when a Minister could visit the laboratory at the same time as my hon. Friend and myself, and in the end we could not make the visit. I have deeply regretted that ever since, as the visit would have been most interesting and would have helped us to understand the situation. I hope that Members on both sides of the House will deprecate the fact that Opposition Members were prevented from finding out about and visiting Government laboratories.

Only about half the Warren Spring staff moved to AEAT, a few moved to other posts in the DTI, and the rest took voluntary or compulsory redundancy. That is a pity, because a great deal of valuable environment-related work has been lost, and the expertise has probably been lost for ever. I know at first hand how valuable that work was, because Warren Spring was one of the main laboratories which analysed the samples taken in my constituency by Cambridge city council to monitor air pollution and established that Cambridge is one of the most heavily polluted cities in the country due to the effects of traffic. I am therefore well aware of the valuable work done by staff at the Warren Spring laboratory, and I hope that it is being continued, at least in part, by the staff at AEAT.

There has been a rundown of the work done by AEA Technology. I would regard the AEA as being very valuable as a technology transfer organisation. The Select Committee on Science and Technology said that it was crucial to our national economic prosperity that the science base and the work done by universities and other institutions should be transferred into manufacturing technology. That is one of the most important purposes of public sector research establishments such as the AEA, which have direct contact with industry. The AEA provides a valuable consultancy service and is able to offer technical assistance regarding the research carried on in other institutions. That research can be passed to industrial applications to ensure that they take full advantage of it.

In earlier days, research associations provided that valuable role with a large element of Government funding. Since that Government funding disappeared, a lot of the research associations have diminished in size and reduced in effectiveness, and we are left with a small number of establishments such as AEA Technology which play a valuable role. That is different from the situation in Germany, where the Fraunhofer institutes play an extremely important part in transferring basic science and technology expertise to the industrial sector. That explains why Germany is so much more successful than the UK in manufacturing and production.

It is worth reviewing what will be lost following this privatisation. Jobs will be lost, including the jobs of people who have skill and expertise beyond the norm in this country and who have been trained at great expense by the state in science and technology. They have skills which we are supposed to value. We tell young people to study science and technology to help them get a job more easily; yet time and again people with valuable science and technology skills are made redundant, sometimes in their late 40s or early 50s when they have little chance of getting other jobs.

We are also losing the important base for Government research and development. That is not a one-off; it is part of a continuing trend. Statistics in the forward look statistical supplement published last year show that between 1986 and the projected spending for 1996 Government Departments will have reduced their research and development expenditure by a massive 46.7 per cent. The Ministry of Defence has had its research and development expenditure reduced during that period by 34.4 per cent. I do not particularly object to defence expenditure being reduced, as the end of the cold war has meant that we are living in a much more stable environment, but the fact that that money is not being transferred to civil research and development is a disgrace and the Government should be ashamed of that.

We are losing jobs and the important base for Government research development. We are also losing the supply of people into Government policy making. When one looks at the profiles of Government Departments, it is quite worrying that there are few scientists in the higher grades. The only places from which scientists can come are the Government research establishments, as they find their way to the top of those organisations and then into Departments. They can then become practising scientists and intelligent customers with real scientific expertise.

In the Department of Trade and Industry, for example, those in grades 1 to 3 make up a total of 70 staff, of whom only nine have science and technology qualifications. In the same grades in all Government Departments the total staff is 737, of whom only 59 have science and technology qualifications. That situation is not tolerated in other countries, which expect people involved in policy making to have science and technology qualifications. Our approach leads to poorer quality decision making by Government, and we should redress that.

We shall also lose the Government's resource to provide expertise at times of national emergency, and also the retention of expertise. Once AEA Technology is privatised, there is no guarantee that that expertise will remain available to the Government. The expertise may not remain as a single body, and it may split up in a way which makes it inaccessible.

A great deal of senior management time will also be lost, as indeed is happening already. What has happened during the past couple of years—and will happen in the next couple of years—is that instead of getting on with the job of making AEA Technology into a thriving organisation the senior management of AEAT will be spending their time in a diversionary way. They will be looking at how to privatise, how to arrange the rest of the organisation and how to improve staff morale and little effort will go into the actual running of the organisation.

The philosophy in relation to this privatisation should be, "If it's not broke, don't mend it." If there are no clear benefits, we should not proceed with the privatisation. The only clear benefit that I can see is that it will raise revenue for the Government. There will be a continuation

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

of the run-down in DTI research and development, which has been reduced by between £200 million and £300 million between 1985 and 1994.

The Government have not treated the safeguarding of the nation's knowledge base with respect, and this privatisation is another indication of the rather bizarre way in which they are discarding the nation's expertise. The stability of the work force will be lost as replacement of long-term research with short-term contracts will result from the commercial pressures to which this organisation will be subject. It is a sad commentary on the research and development industry in the United Kingdom that we so often find that long-term research is going out of the window, to be replaced by very short-term contracts which make it difficult to plan for the future.

A more important question is why the privatisation is being undertaken at this particular time. The Government have given themselves the tools and the procedures with which to plan much more effectively what happens to our public sector research establishments. We have a combination of two procedures. One is the forward look and the other is the technology foresight programme. They can be used as a means to identify overlap and encourage change without undue disruption. We should examine the scientific capabilities of the entire country and assess the research that we need to carry out to ensure our prosperity and quality of life into the future. We should use forward look and technology foresight to identify the areas in which rationalisation is possible. We should examine the scientific capabilities that we need to carry out research on topics identified by technology foresight.

The technology foresight programme has been running for more than 12 months now. Some recommendations from it have been carried forward into the science spending statement made by the Minister recently. We have not seen a full-scale publication of the technology foresight exercise which will identify the factors that I have outlined. I am therefore curious to know why the Government have decided to jump the gun and proceed with the privatisation of AEA at this particular time. The science and technology base is undergoing rational change and the Office of Science and Technology in particular should use the new tools available to it and not proceed in an ad hoc manner but implement change in a much more orderly way.

I draw to a conclusion by quoting the president of the Royal Society, who stated recently:

"we should remind ourselves that many of these"—

he was talking about the services provided by the public sector research establishments—

"were taken over by the state because (as perceived by the electorate at that time) the privately run services were inadequate or unsatisfactory. The arguments in favour would have varied but would have included the advantage of unification, public safety and long-term planning."

That is worth bearing in mind as we may find ourselves facing a similar situation in the future. Much of the work would then have been seen to be unnecessary.

It is also worth quoting an editorial in the *Financial Times*. Even though it was in favour of privatisation, it had the following to say:

"The ideal solution must be a management buy-out. This would create a sense of partnership among the company's employees and guarantee the AEA the independence to underpin its credibility as a consultancy.

The alternative would be flotation as a private company. This would not be easy, however, since investors would have to ensure that the AEA had a worthwhile portfolio of contracts, and that its principal assets—people—would not walk out of the door.

Only as a last resort should the Government consider the remaining option: sale in whole or in part to trade purchasers. This would be highly unsatisfactory. The AEA would lose its independence and, if broken up, its range of skills as well."

That was a comment from someone who favoured privatisation, but I would say that there is one alternative open: not to proceed with privatisation at all.

8.53 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am grateful for the opportunity to say just a few words in this Second Reading debate. I associate myself with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). He made a masterly presentation of what has been right and wrong in the nuclear industry and in particular in AEA in the past 20 or 30 years. His speech also demonstrated the right way ahead for AEA Technology.

It is worth contrasting my hon. Friend's speech with that of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who seemed to think that nothing right could possibly happen. He simply dwelt on what were in many ways the false trails along which technology and the nuclear industry were led in past years.

The speech of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) showed up clearly the shambles of the Opposition's policy on nuclear energy. Until recently, it was clear that the policy was to shut down as many power stations as possible as quickly as possible. It is strange that all Opposition Members who have spoken tonight referred to the damage that would be done to our nuclear industry and more specifically to AEA if it went into the private sector, when but a few months if not a few years ago the industry would not have existed as we know it today if the Labour party had been in government. Labour Members are not in a responsible position to comment on what the Government want to do with this part of the nuclear industry.

It is worth noting the change that has occurred in the nuclear industry in the past eight to 10 years. There is little doubt in my mind that until 1980 or 1982 it was a high-cost industry. Indeed, it would be true to say that it did not even know what its costs were. It was driven by all the bureaucratic devices that have been mentioned. The way in which it has been transformed is a tribute to it. It operates in the much more commercial climate that has resulted from the vast majority of the electricity industry being in the private sector.

I should go further than that. I cannot see that Nuclear Electric, even though it is still in the public sector, would have achieved greater efficiency if the other two power companies had not already been privatised. That acted as a spur. As a result, Nuclear Electric was forced to compete. There is now a transparency of costs that did

not exist before and greater efficiency, with more generation of electricity by the nuclear industry than ever before.

I sincerely hope that we will have the results of the nuclear review sooner rather than later and that those results will acknowledge the fact that at present we have a most unlevel playing field for the generation of electricity. The nuclear industry rightly has safeguards far in advance of any other safeguards in the rest of the electricity generating industry. I hope that the Minister, who is in his place, will take note of the fact that people—especially those, such as myself, in the north-west—would think it wrong if part of Nuclear Electric were given to Scottish Nuclear Ltd. as a way of making the privatisation of that part of the generation of nuclear energy more equitable. That would be the wrong way forward. I think that I speak for all Members in Lancashire when I say that it would not be considered to be the right way of proceeding.

The efficiencies that have been evident in the generating part of the nuclear industry have also been shown, more recently, in AEA Technology. There is little doubt that, as a result of what the Government have done in the past few years, that part of the industry has become more competitive and more commercially minded.

What can happen in that part of the industry was demonstrated by the first privatisation—that of Amersham International. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) clearly showed how the privatisation of a small company, as it then was, whose products were held in high regard and which had a great deal of technical expertise, provided that it is managed properly, can increase not only profits but jobs—by 50 per cent. That must be the way in which hon. Members on both sides of the House wish AEA Technology to progress.

I cannot envisage that happening in the public sector. I cannot envisage the constraints imposed by the Treasury and the bureaucratic environment in the public sector allowing AEA Technology to realise its full potential as a group, bringing to the market unique skills in many different areas, such as product enhancement, plant and safety performance and environmental matters.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage about the way in which the company should be privatised. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry to ensure that AEA Technology is put into the private sector as an entity in its own right and not split up. I suggest that he considers closely the success of the Water Research Council, which was very much the research arm of the water industry in the public sector and which has been placed in the private sector so successfully. It now not only works for water companies but has developed a considerable expertise abroad and is expanding quickly.

Privatisation also demonstrates the use of devices that allow the maximum amount of share ownership among employees. Many hon. Friends know that I feel that we have not taken enough advantage of that aspect of the privatisation of public companies. AEA Technology offers us the opportunity to ensure that many, if not all, its employees become shareholders in the company. If we do that, there is a much better chance of the company being able to prosper in the private sector, just as the WRC has prospered.

Privatisation should have occurred before now. I understand the difficulties associated with separating the different parts of what was the Atomic Energy Authority from one another, but now we definitely have a company in the public sector that is ripe to enter the private sector as one entity. If it does, there will be a much larger repeat of the success that Amersham International had more than a decade ago.

9.2 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): We have had some thoughtful and informed speeches from Conservative Members and some exceptionally long speeches from very few Members of the Opposition.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): We have had the same number as yours.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is not true.

The Opposition said that the Atomic Energy Authority was a last-minute inclusion in the Queen's Speech. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) called it a rushed privatisation. In fact, the Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), announced in a written answer, as long ago as 17 February 1994, that:

"the business activities in the AEA's new commercial division are capable of privatisation".—[*Official Report*, 17 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. *923*.]

That was about eight months before the Queen's Speech—hardly a rushed inclusion.

Predictably, the Bill's publication on 2 March 1995 was greeted with hostility, especially by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, and by the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists.

Many speeches this evening have mentioned the fact that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has been split in two. AEA Technology comprises a large range of nuclear and non-nuclear consultancies and research services, and that part of the business will be privatised under the legislation. The Government will retain AEA Government division, which will remain in public hands to oversee the substantial task of decommissioning the authority's many nuclear sites, including the Magnox power stations. AEA Technology is likely to be a £250 million business, capable of generating profits of £10 million next year and £20 million the year after. Its turnover could double in five or six years.

Mention has been made of the some 4,000 employees of AEA Technology. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East referred to the rundown in the number of employees. However, in the 1960s the business employed 16,000 people, so one could hardly claim that there has been a rundown in staff numbers recently to facilitate privatisation.

Half the 4,000 employees are scientists and engineers and their conditions of service must be a priority. Concerns have been expressed about their service conditions. Of course, they will be subject to the TUPE regulations, which means that their future conditions of service will be broadly the same as their existing conditions in AEA Technology. Schedule 3 deals with transferred pension rights which are modelled on previous privatisations.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

AEA Technology has four nuclear and five industrial businesses. It delivers innovative technology and services to more than 2,000 organisations, many of which are household names and leading blue-chip companies. Although the United Kingdom and Europe constitute the company's largest market sectors, it is rapidly expanding into the United States of America, south-east Asia and 70 countries worldwide. That rate of diversification will be beneficial not only for the company but for its employees in giving the company a firmer foundation on which to base its future operations.

Hon. Members have referred to the activities of AEA. It delivers a huge range of services and technologies. It has developed a system to test aircraft carbon fibre propellers, in which a company in my constituency, Doughty Air Propellers, has an interest. AEA Technology has been instrumental in helping Airbus Industries in Toulouse—which I was fortunate enough to visit during the summer—to produce a test so that the structure of the carbon fibre on aircraft wings can be verified and any deterioration discovered quickly.

AEA Technology is also involved in a number of environmental technologies which have been mentioned tonight. For instance, it participates in the European Space Agency's ENVISAT satellite environmental testing system, which is at the forefront of our space and science technology. No nuclear-powered submarine can go to sea without first having an AEA test.

The company is involved in a number of other industries, including the electricity industry. It promotes energy efficiency, which will be extremely important if we are to meet our Rio target of stabilising CO2 emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000. It has been involved in promoting and producing the lithium-ion cathode battery technology, which is now in use worldwide thanks to a licensing agreement with Sony Technology.

AEA Technology is a world-beating company. Hon. Members have mentioned the fact that the company helps foreign Governments and they have referred to its partnership with the Ukraine Government in helping with the Chernobyl disaster clean-up. That has been accomplished partly through direct tender for contracts and partly through European Union funding.

Why should we consider privatising the company? Before Opposition Members laugh at that suggestion they should recall that it was Labour's Minister of Power, Fred Lee, who in 1965 promised an expectant nation that we would capture all the export markets of the world if we were to mass build all of his new advanced gas-cooled reactors. We all know what a disaster that decision was for the nuclear industry. It has taken 30 years to get over the problem of those advanced cooled gas reactors and it will take another 30 years and billions of pounds to decommission them.

Not only Fred Lee was involved in that programme; the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was involved in promoting the programme. If those strategic decisions had been taken not by the political Freds and Tonys but by the private sector we would not have had such disastrous results and the nuclear industries would not have had to recover from those decisions ever since. It was not until recently—until Sizewell B came on stream, not only early on the contract time but below budget, and until the Government had the courage to make a major strategic decision to adopt a wholly new technology—that we returned to the forefront of nuclear technology in the world.

The importance of that decision was that 70 smaller companies were involved in the building and commissioning of Sizewell B, the major one of which was AEA. It will benefit from having gained expertise at Sizewell and will adopt that expertise in the emerging market for pressurised water reactors throughout the world. That will give it a great leg up in nuclear technology.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East asked why it was necessary to privatise the company. As I pointed out to him, public companies operating in the public sector with Treasury rules and the external finance limit that they have to meet simply become starved of investment. We saw it with virtually every industry in the public sector. British Steel was losing £500,000 a week in the public sector; now it is the most efficient steel producing company in the world.

Mr. Purchase: May I correct the hon. Gentleman and remind him that I represent Wolverhampton, North-East, although I am proud of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner)? Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the external finance limit and the rules imposed upon those companies can be changed? They are not God-given and the tremendous success that he has mentioned has been underpinned by the very rules that he now criticises.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I bowled the hon. Gentleman a googly and now he has come back with a leg break. I mentioned the simple answer in an earlier intervention. If the assets—particularly the loans—of any organisation are accountable to the Treasury, of course the Treasury has to set proper financial directions for that organisation. Opposition Members would be first to criticise us if the Treasury were to allow any organisation to operate at a loss for any length of time. Therefore, proper external finance limits, financial guidance and, indeed, administrative guidance have to be given to every organisation in the public sector, and AEA Technology is not immune from that process.

Opposition Members would be the first to criticise us if we set a nil external finance limit for any of the organisations that have had substantial injections of public funds. That would be no way for a responsible Government to organise their affairs. Therefore, anyone who says that any company can operate as a quasi public sector company but with no external finance limit is not living in the real world. In my view, the only alternative is to have a fully public sector company to which the full rigours of the market do not apply, or to allow the full rigours of the market to apply, in which case all the benefits of the private market will apply.

What are those benefits? Private companies have innovation and the incentive to make a profit. Profit is a dirty word for the Opposition, but profit must be made before there can be reinvestment. Without that, the company cannot invest in new markets, find new technologies and produce new inventions as I have already suggested AEA should do and has the capability of doing. Like British Gas, British Steel and British Telecom, it can become a world-beating company. I want it to become a household name. I want its workers to benefit because they will have secure jobs that are well

paid. I want its shareholders to benefit through increased dividends. Above all, I want the country to benefit because the company will pay increased corporation tax as a result of making a profit.

This virtuous cycle of privatisation has been recognised throughout the world, but still the Labour party cannot recognise it.

9.14 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I congratulate and welcome the new Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy who, I gather, will make his debut at the Dispatch Box when he winds up the debate. I look forward to hearing his response to the serious questions that have been raised about the Bill by hon. Members on both sides of the House and hope that he will provide some answers.

The Bill is a space filler in the Government's rather thin programme, and its intention is to atomise AEA Technology. The chairman of AEA Technology, Sir Anthony Cleaver, suggested one reason why the company might not be attractive to potential private sector investors. He was reported in *The Observer* of 24 April as saying:

"The real problem for the City is to understand what we do."

I hope that, as a result of this debate, people will be better informed. It has been a well-informed debate and all hon. Members have spoken of contacts, and the work of AEA Technology has reached almost every constituency of every hon. Member who has contributed to the debate.

AEA Technology is the world's largest engineering and science consultancy and it is precisely because it is of such quality that we oppose its fragmentation in this manner. UKAEA's annual review for 1993-94 praises a Government Department in a way that they are rarely praised these days, and we endorse that praise. It says:

"AEA Technology's vision is to become a flagship science and engineering services business working in partnership with a broad range of customers world wide to improve their competitive edge.

Our unique wide-skills base, built up from working at the leading edge of science and technology for over 40 years, is focused on providing integrated solutions in the closely related fields of plant and process performance, safety and environment."

I stress the words "unique wide-skills base", "leading edge" and "built up over 40 years". AEA Technology takes a diverse, yet integrated, approach. Why, then, should the Government dismantle it in this way? The company's scientists are technically the best in the world.

Interestingly, the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who is no longer present in the Chamber, expressed his fears that this could be another Government redundancy programme in the public sector. He also seriously queried the shifting of decommissioning responsibilities in UKAEA and AEA Technology simply to move it around in order later to break it up. The Minister for Energy and Industry did not answer the questions in his earlier presentation, and I hope that we shall hear some answers in the winding-up speech.

The hon. Member for South Dorset said that he suspected a sub-plot. Opposition Members, too, believe that there is a sub-plot. AEA Technology already engages in international science and engineering activity. It has not, as some Conservative Members suggest, been stopped in its tracks. On the contrary, it is making huge strides, which is the whole point. The Science and Technology Act 1965 contained a section that extended the AEA's research functions and allowed it to carry out non-nuclear research and development under contract for its customers. It could be argued that the AEA does not need the Bill to enable it to extend its functions and develop, as it can recoup its investment in licence agreements and the rest. Again, the annual report states:

"AEA Technology can solve many problems better and more effectively than those who depend on bringing together a number of small companies, each with a narrow field of expertise. AEA Technology's major customers frequently draw on the skills of more than one operating division."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) spelt out in his speech, the seamless activity within the organisation is its unique property, its greatest asset. There is space for lateral thinking, for research boundaries to be crossed, to create space for new development and new ideas, to integrate experience and expertise. There has been more than 40 years of experimental research, and a whole range of spin-offs from that primary nuclear research has developed in recent years, and we have heard about many tonight. In health, they include developments in carbon fibre hips and in laparoscopes for keyhole surgery. There have been developments in propulsion units for satellites. There have even been developments to protect aircraft from lightning strikes. In electronics, there have been developments in hybrid integrated circuit packaging, which is now making a major low-cost contribution. There have even been measures to deal with dangerous electronic smog, caused by mobile phones, computers and radio interference.

All those developments—including that mentioned by the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown): the lithium-ion cathode battery technology—are respected internationally and turned into products that are used. There are other areas, including heat transfer and fluid flow services. There are the non-nuclear consultancies, and the work of the energy technology support unit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell)—a diligent champion for science and technology in the House—referred to air pollution in Cambridge. Again, that is part of the work. What about chemical monitoring and conservation expertise? AEA Technology is leading the field in a whole range of areas, including safety in the North sea.

Why, then, with that tremendous non-nuclear environmental expertise, are the Government going to place it in jeopardy with the Bill? It could all be lost if the Bill goes through. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) suggested that it can succeed only if there is a sell-off. Precisely the opposite it true. It is succeeding because of its integrated functions and, of course, its well-respected international consultancy services. At least some good is associated with Government activity, when our Government's research is associated with cleaning up after the Chernobyl disaster. We are used in Slovakia because of our expertise in this country, which then reflects on the science base, to the celebration of scientists in this country. Why privatise it, push it out, suggest that there is no role? It is a fully fledged integrated operation. It is our best example of technology transfer. Because it is successful, it does not need the spur of sell-off that the Government propose. There is no need to palm it off. It is not inefficient.

[Mr. John Battle]

Again, in the annual report, the chairman wrote:

"With our business strategy aimed at increasing profitability through the more efficient use of resources, exploitation of international markets and improved customer care, we decided to focus AEA Technology's products and services on the three inter-related fields of plant and process performance, safety and environment. All of these are areas of growing expenditure by industry world-wide. We therefore expect global demand for our services to increase substantially over the next decade . . . The outlook for AEA Technology is therefore bright and we are working enthusiastically to continue to develop a profitable, integrated business with a good track record and to exploit to the full the opportunities which are apparent both nationally and internationally."

AEA Technology is not inefficient. It employs more than 4,000 staff. The business has a turnover of £250 million, derived from the invoices of services, products, royalties and completed long-term contracts. The profits alone are reported to be, as other hon. Members have mentioned, about £10 million. In an interview with *The Engineer* magazine, on 8 December last year, the chief executive of the AEA, Dr. Peter Watson, was reported as saying that the annual turnover would rise to £400 million over the next three years. Of the present turnover, 41 per cent. comes from work for the Government, 18 per cent. from other public bodies, including, as has been mentioned, from local authorities as well as private sector business in Britain, and 23 per cent. from work for overseas customers. In other words, it is not an inefficient business. That is the whole point. The only thing that jeopardises it and threatens to make it inefficient is the Bill.

In the debate on the Loyal Address on 21 November, the President of the Board of Trade claimed that privatisation of AEA Technology

"will benefit consumers and, of course, add to national competitiveness."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 355.]

It is hard to see how in the proposals before us. As John Billard of IPMS said:

"The cost in lost jobs, redundancies and future changes to government will far exceed AEA's market value."

In the memorandum that the IPMS submitted to the Select Committee on Science and Technology, dealing with the efficiency unit's scrutiny of the public sector research units, it said:

"In the case of AEA which is already a Trading Fund and operates at arm's length from government, the rush to privatise the 'commercial' arm of AEA Technology and separate it from a government owned decommissioning authority requires careful review from several angles. Firstly, it will remove from government a major pool of expertise on nuclear and other energy matters other than those relating to decommissioning."

It goes on:

"the increasing profit projects for AEA Technology rely on exploitation of monopoly positions that currently exist . . . and without the guarantee of long-term government contracts after flotation, the future of the Division would be at risk."

We have heard nothing today of any of those guarantees. It is becoming increasingly clear from today's debate that privatisation makes not only no political sense and no sense in terms of Britain's science base but no economic sense.

When the Under-Secretary replies, will he confirm that more than £300 million will have to be set aside to cover redundancy costs and pensions to staff not transferring to the privatised body? If so, the costs of putting scientific skills out to grass and the huge loss to the United Kingdom economy will be more than the Government want to make from the sale. That must be economic nonsense.

As has been mentioned, AEA Technology includes the National Environmental Technology Centre which came out of the merger with Warren Spring Laboratory. It is worth recalling that fewer staff from Warren Spring transferred to AEA Technology than was promised.

According to the written evidence presented by the IPMS to the Science and Technology Committee,

"Only half the staff and functions moved to the AEA, and they have been dispersed within the AEA rather than merged with one particular unit—the NETC as promised. A few staff have been moved to other posts in the DTI and the rest have gone on either voluntary or compulsory redundancy."

In other words, given our experience so far, the omens are not good.

Much valuable environmental related work has already been lost in what should be a vital area within our economy. The Department of Trade and Industry's record on research and development is appalling. On the very day that the science White Paper "Realising our Potential" was published, the DTI closed down the collaborative research programme with the Science and Engineering Research Council at an estimated loss of £40 million to research and development from public funds. The record of the Department of Trade and Industry is not good.

Many hon. Members have asked—we shall listen with interest to the Under-Secretary's reply—how the privatisation will be carried out. That is still not clear. Barclays de Zoete Wedd, which carried out the Government-commissioned consultancy study, at one point recommended contracting out the United Kingdom nuclear fusion research programme. There was then a suggestion that the fusion programme be transferred to the research councils, but that was dropped.

In answer to a parliamentary question on 17 February 1994 on the future of the AEA, the Minister for Energy and Industry said:

"Decisions on the form of privatisation will be taken in due course, but there is no presumption that this should follow the present structure. The decisions taken will be based on the performance in the market place and the extent to which the various options would meet customer requirements, enhanced competition, help to improve United Kingdom competitiveness and maximise the return to the taxpayer."—[*Official Report*, 17 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. *923*.]

That tells us very little. As the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) pointed out, if Ministers are not prepared to say how AEA Technology is to be privatised, we should not even be discussing the Bill.

This is one of those enabling Bills. It is simply saying, "Give me, the Secretary of State, power to do what I want." It contains what are described as

"largely standard form privatisation provisions".

Going on current form, we know what that means, and it is not welcome. It is not good enough simply to claim that a variety of options will be left open for the exact method of AEA Technology's privatisation. Employment cuts have already been made with the short-term aim of satisfying the City analysts who have been softened up to buy the concern from the Government.

According to the Minister, we do not know whether the company will be sold as a whole or in parts, by the authority of the Secretary of State or by flotation or trade

sale; we do not know whether it will be incorporated or unincorporated; we do not know whether it will be wholesale. Barclays de Zoete Wedd had no evidence of a single purchaser in the wings, despite what Conservative Members have suggested. A management buy-out was suggested, but the chief executive, Sir Anthony Cleaver, is reported as saying in July 1994 that a management buy-out was "not being discussed seriously". The options are first put up, and then knocked down.

On 8 April 1993, *The Engineer* suggested that finding a large enough prospective company would prove extremely difficult. There is not a big enough buyer out there to take over the company lock, stock and barrel. All that is really on offer is its fragmentation into separate businesses—a form of cherry picking that will undermine its activity. That is as rational a science policy as ringing up Mystic Meg: the driving force behind it is revenue collection. It is driven by ideological short-term impulses to cash the business in because the Treasury needs to balance the books. This is a Treasury-driven Bill, which—as my hon. Friends have said throughout the debate—has nothing to do with a science policy initiative.

The irony is that, although hon. Members on the opposite Benches call themselves Conservatives, throughout the last 15 years of Conservative government we have seen "Conservatives" who conserve nothing. They tear things up: they are the great dismantlers of our time. They destroy what is working well, defying the classic advice, "If it works, don't fix it." In this case, it is, "Simply fit it up for privatisation." It will be much harder to piece together the necessary experience and expertise once it has been broken down.

In its report to the DTI, BZW referred to

"deriving maximum benefit from synergies";

but the Bill undermines the meaning of the word "synergy". It is a fragmenting Bill. The Government have a fetish about privatisation: the Bill exists because they did not manage to privatise the Royal Mail. If it moves, privatise it; if the Government cannot privatise one concern, they find another to privatise.

Is the message not getting through to the Government yet? The public are fed up to the back teeth with privatisation. This is a classic move of short-termism—the short-termism that has characterised the Government's approach to research and development. If anything could be described as the hallmark of the present Administration—their characteristic trait—it is that short-termism: that interest only in what can be sold today. If something cannot be marketed immediately, it is of no value.

That is not the attitude to research that our country needs. It is not a view that invests in the future. The Government push near-market research all the time at the expense of basic research, with the result that Britain falls further and further behind. In recent years, Britain's research and development have declined, and Government spending has declined proportionately. It is down every year. We are not arguing that the Government should fund all research and development, but the worrying trend is going in the opposite direction to that in all our competitor nations. Where it is successful, we should be supporting research rather than simply flogging it off. The Bill has no rationale. We should reject this bit of unthought-out privatisation.

In the White Paper "Realising our Potential", the Government stated:

"careful consideration will need to be given to holding the level of any such capacity to the minimum necessary to meet the Government's statutory responsibilities and other essential requirements".

The decision to sell the Department of Trade and Industry's best integrated research and the best international research that we have speaks volumes. We urge the Government to think again. They should start to focus on our country's long-term strategic scientific interests. It is against the national economic interest to press ahead with the Bill. It is a fag end of a policy at the fag end of the Conservative Government. It is time that they were out. The Bill deserves to go no further. We will oppose it tonight.

9.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): I thank the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) for his kind words at the start of his speech. From then on, however, it went downhill. When I heard that this would be a full day's debate, I must confess that I was slightly worried that I would have to make a winding-up speech lasting three quarters of an hour or an hour. But I forgot one of the Peter principles: that work expands to fill the time available. I should like to thank all hon. Members who have made my task so much easier—it is much appreciated.

I should like the House to recognise that, contrary to what many Opposition Members have said, the Bill that places AEA Technology in privatisation mode is not dogma driven, but sheer common sense. *[Interruption.]* I hear them laugh, but they should wait and see. AEA Technology can achieve its huge potential only in the private sector. Every examination that we have had points that way. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State reminded us that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission said that the company

"rests uneasily in the state sector".

The Barclays de Zoete Wedd report came out the same.

The Bill gives the Labour party a golden opportunity to show whether its clause IV road to Damascus conversion, or rather its road to Inverness conversion, is real. As the minutes tick away, it still has a chance to repent, to come over to the Conservative side, and to make the words of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) a reality. But what do I hear and see? Moans and groans and the shaking of a head. As I suspected, whatever the packaging, old Labour is a little like old Adam—it is still lurking underneath.

Enough of that; let us get on to the business ahead. The Bill is not dogma driven.

Mr. Battle: Convince me.

Mr. Page: When I have finished, the hon. Gentleman will be convinced. I want to spend some time telling hon. Members about AEA Technology. I want to show them why it needs to be in the private sector to achieve that potential. We should consider AEA Technology—

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Tell me you are going to.

Mr. Page: We are going to. That is the purpose of the Bill. If we consider AEA Technology, an image is conjured up of white coats, scientists and nuclear reactors. That does not have much to do with the man in the street

[Mr. Page]

or the man on the proverbial No. 9 Clapham omnibus. AEA Technology is not like that. Let me suggest that it stands not for Atomic Energy Authority but for advanced engineering applications. That is AEA Technology's business. It applies leading-edge science and engineering skills to enhance industry's products, to improve its performance and to make it safer and more environmentally friendly. One or two hon. Members asked what the core is of AEA Technology. I suggest that that could be a core mission statement.

I must confess that AEA Technology is not a title that trips off the tongue. If another name could be devised that retained the links with its parent while being a little more user-friendly, I would not stand in its way.

AEA Technology provides solutions to everyday problems that face businesses in one way or another and affect us all. As the world becomes more and more environmentally conscious, the opportunities for AEA Technology will grow. That is the reason behind the debate. We want to set AEA Technology free to grow and develop.

I know that many Opposition Members and many of my hon. Friends have mentioned what AEA Technology is doing now. It is the world's largest safety and reliability consultancy, with expertise based on 30 years or so of involvement in nuclear plant safety. The techniques used to meet the safety standards demanded by the nuclear industry are directly applicable to transport, to which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State referred in his opening remarks. I shall not talk in detail about what it is doing, but it is working in partnership with British Rail and London Underground. It is helping to design stations to minimise the risk of fire and make them much safer places. It has pioneered a holistic approach to aircraft testing, designed to ensure that inspection routines pick up any structural defects before they become potential hazards.

Let us take paint, or more precisely fireproof paint. Fire can be just as damaging—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not worry about businesses. They do not worry about earning and making a profit. Their casual remarks about their satisfaction with the profitability currently being achieved by AEA Technology are staggering and I might refer to that later.

Fire is just as much a threat to commercial activity as it is to human life. A business and the jobs associated with it cannot go on if the factory, warehouse or office are damaged, gutted or require extensive repair. AEA Technology developed a fireproof paint for structural steelwork which, I am told, is easy to apply, because I have not applied any. More importantly, it envelopes the metal in a protective layer of foam at temperatures above 250 deg C. By delaying the buckling of the steelwork—it is hard to believe that RSJs buckle like sticks of plasticine, but I have seen it happen—the paint increases the chances of a building surviving intact and getting back into action much sooner.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): I am just wondering whether the Minister was talking about paint or whitewash.

Mr. Page: That is one of the best interventions that the hon. Gentleman has made in all the years that he has been in the House. The House can judge the standard of the rest.

Let me come back to paint—not whitewash. The paint is used in many buildings, particularly by the British Airports Authority. As the House will know immediately, the mention of airports will bring me on to artificial limbs. The House will see the immediate connection. Aircraft and artificial limbs have two common characteristics. They must be lightweight and capable of withstanding high levels of stress. AEA Technology worked with the manufacturers to produce an artificial leg that is very light, but extremely strong and capable of supporting the heaviest and most active of customers. Over 10,000 people a year benefit directly from its skills.

I should like to stop talking in general terms and concentrate in more detail on one of the specific things that goes on at AEA Technology—the National Chemical Emergency Centre. The centre provides immediate expert advice and support 24 hours a day and 365 days a year to the emergency services and others faced with incidents involving potentially dangerous chemicals. One of the first jobs that I undertook as soon as I found out that I had become a Minister was to visit Harwell and Culham. I sat in the control room at the centre and saw it at work. I shall give the House a few real-life examples of what goes on there to show how its skills operate.

There is an overturned tanker on the motorway and chemicals are leaking on to the road. Through radio and computer technology, within minutes the fire officer in charge has full information on the chemical and knows how he should deal with it to avert potential danger. The Army ordnance corps in Bosnia rings up on a Sunday morning. A lorry is in a ditch, riddled with bullets and leaking cyanide-based chemicals from damaged drums. The men on the ground need advice quickly on how to respond and protect themselves. Even though it is Sunday, advice is available within a few minutes.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I am delighted to hear that my hon. Friend is such a supporter of Hazchem, which, as he so rightly mentions, is a staple of the chemical industry. Will he tell the House a little more about how successful it has been in establishing European Union standards for hazardous chemicals?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend makes the point that the centre has led the way in introducing uniform signs, especially on the backs of lorries, so that throughout the European Union—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but they should know from travelling on roads that on the backs of lorries signs tell them what chemical is carried. My hon. Friend is absolutely right in making the point that we have succeeded in leading the way in bringing about that form of harmonisation.

Mr. Frank Cook: I am afraid that I must correct the Minister. The Hazchem system—standing for hazardous chemicals—was devised on Teesside, between Cleveland county council and Imperial Chemical Industries plc. Let us have the record straight, please.

Mr. Page: That is absolutely right, but the centre uses the system for all its customers whenever it can. I have been to the centre and seen it in operation.

The last example that I shall give the House is of a jumbo jet landing at Heathrow. It has a leaking drum in its hold. The documentation on the load shows that the contents are relatively harmless, but the labelling on the drum indicates the presence of something altogether nastier. The centre is asked to send people to the airport

to find out what the chemical is and deal with the situation. On arrival, they confirm that the drum contains a dangerous chemical—toxic, corrosive, flammable and exactly the wrong sort of substance to be sloshing around the hold of a trans-Atlantic jet. The centre's team immediately supervises the decontamination of the aircraft. Yes, it is a routine enough job for the centre, but the consequences of what may have happened if that aircraft had taken off do not bear thinking about.

Hon. Members have spoken about AEA Technology as a world leader in computational fluid dynamics. This is not the hour to go into computational fluid dynamics or to explain it to the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."]—even though I can see that one or two hon. Members are burning to know about its advantages. Essentially, it deals with fluid flow and heat transfer problems. The technology was originally developed for nuclear purposes, but it has wide-ranging uses across industry.

AEA Technology, as all hon. Members recognise, has many strands of activity that are applicable throughout the world to safety and the environment. I am absolutely convinced that without the spur and the opportunity of moving into the private sector, AEA Technology will not be able to take full advantage of its potential. Any business needs a chance to develop, a chance to expand. It needs to market its products; it needs to tell the world just how good we are in that particular area. That is why AEA Technology currently has overseas offices in Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Prague, Bratislava, Budapest, Brussels and Washington. All those offices, except the one in Washington, are new offices that have opened in the past year.

Mr. Battle: The Government's usual argument is to say that they are privatising an enterprise because it is not succeeding. AEA Technology is doing extremely well. Why privatise it?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman may be satisfied with the progress of AEA Technology. I believe that it can do a lot better and I shall come on to that point.

Much as I am enjoying myself, as time is running out, I shall refer to some of the comments made by hon. Members. I respond first to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), who opened the debate on behalf of the Labour party. I was surprised by the first part of his speech, because I thought that he was talking about the Post Office; I thought that I had gone into the wrong debate. He then moved on to other matters and he was joined by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), who ran the tired old plea of saying that having commercial activities in the state system bankrolled by the taxpayer and then second-guessed by the politician was the way forward. Has the Labour party not yet realised, through all the successes of privatisation, that that is not the way forward? The way forward is to let commercial managers dealing in the real world make the decisions. We should let them go forward and provide jobs, opportunities and expansion.

If Labour Members want a classic example of what they are advocating, I remind them of the National Enterprise Board. Politicians went out picking winners. How many hundreds of millions did that cost the taxpayer? More than enough. That is exactly why the industry should be allowed to make its own decisions and that is why it should not be second-guessed by the experts on the Opposition Benches.

I take issue with some of the remarks about the decision-making process behind Procord. I found them distasteful and inaccurate, and they were full of innuendo. I am glad tonight to be able to give the lie to some of the comments made. I am fresh to this job, so I do not carry any particular baggage. I have seen the figures connected with Procord. I cannot tell the House the figures because they are commercially confidential, but I can give hon. Members an absolute assurance that the decision to choose Procord was clear cut because its offer was far ahead of any other offer. Not to have taken that offer would have been ridiculous. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said, Sir Anthony Cleaver left the room and was not involved when the decision was made. Some of the remarks made were absolutely disgraceful. One of the other reasons for choosing Procord is that it wants to develop a business and to build and expand on that. That was a further opportunity for the staff.

Many hon. Members contributed to the debate; I shall not be able to accommodate all of them. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) made a careful speech. He remarked on the need for flexibility by the work force at Winfrith. He said that those people must change their focus and extend their non-nuclear work. I can confirm to my hon. Friend's constituents his assiduity in promoting the future activities of Winfrith. I suggest that he is one of my more regular correspondents; he was certainly one of my predecessor's regular correspondents.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) and four other hon. Members made the same point. They all wanted a firm commitment to the method of privatisation which, in effect, would close off freedom of choice. There was some suspicion that there was a hidden Government agenda to which we were secretly working. I assure the House that there is no secret Government agenda. All we want is to give AEA Technology the chance over the next year to develop its plans and then to choose the best method to move it forward. Of course, I am aware of the number of hon. Members who want it to be moved into the private sector as one unit on a flotation. I hear and understand that message, but hon. Members will understand that it would be wrong of me either to accept or to deny it tonight.

Mr. Maclennan: Part of the point of the message from the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) and myself, which the Minister may care to address now, is the fact that we want the House to be informed about the method that has been decided upon and then to consider the aptness of that method in the circumstances. Will the Minister undertake to bring the matter back to the House before a decision is taken? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the Minister continues, I must tell hon. Members that I am growing rather tired of hearing running commentaries and private conversations in the House. I should like a little more quiet, so that I can hear the Minister without straining.

Mr. Page: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There is nothing unusual in the process that we are employing, and it will not be necessary to bring the matter to the House. Obviously, the House will be informed about what is to happen, but if the Opposition feel so enthusiastic about discussing it, they can use a Supply day to do so.

[Mr. Page]

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland also said that the proposed appointment of a site managing agent at Dounreay might have some effect on safety. As the House knows, for the Government safety is of paramount importance, and the hon. Gentleman's idea that the appointment of the agent will affect safety is an incorrect assumption.

Dounreay's safety regime will continue to be governed by the legal responsibilities under the nuclear site licence and by the nuclear installations inspectorate's regulatory regime. Those legal responsibilities will remain with UKAEA. It will continue to exercise them by issuing corporate safety instructions. Implementation of the UKAEA safety regime at Dounreay will remain the responsibility of the Government division site director. The managing agent will report to him and operate under his direction. The only difference from the present arrangements will be the presence of a stronger management team, which will enhance rather than diminish safety.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) spelt out the virtues of privatisation and the need to develop new markets, especially overseas. He also drew attention to areas of positive advantage and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), said that the proof of the pudding was in the eating.

Indeed, the closest parallel to AEA Technology is Amersham International, and my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham delivered one by one the hammer blows of the success of that company. Employment is up from 2,000 to 3,400, turnover is up, and profit—a dirty word to the Labour party—is up from £4.1 million to £43.5 million. Yet the Labour party would deny AEAT the chance to deliver the goods and to emulate Amersham International.

I shall bring my remarks to a close by mentioning again the concerns that some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, expressed about safety. Whatever we want to do in such an area, the safety aspect must be paramount, and AEAT is similarly committed to maintaining the highest standards of health and safety. Whether it is in the public or the private sector, it will follow safety procedures fully consistent with those that apply within UKAEA as a whole. The suggestion that a privatised AEAT would cut corners on safety is arrant nonsense and does no credit to the House. Indeed, it is an affront to the dignity of the people in AEAT.

Hon. Members have described UKAEA as a national asset, and I agree. It has one of the highest—if not the highest—concentrations of graduates and skilled manpower in the country, and it has specialist facilities for staff to utilise those skills. It is essential that, as a nation, we get a good return from those skills, and that is what privatisation is all about.

AEA Technology has the potential to become a world-class player in the international science and engineering market. It has the skills and technology to compete successfully in the markets and to secure business for itself and for other British firms. That is what the Bill is about. It is the only way forward, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 250.

Division No. 102] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey

Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Willetts and
Mr. Liam Fox.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew

McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. John Cummings.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Points of Order

10.15 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At about 20 minutes to 10 o'clock this evening, there was a road traffic accident on the pedestrian crossing between Victoria Tower and the roundabout at the end of Lambeth bridge. It appeared to involve at least one motor cycle, which ended up underneath another vehicle and I do not know whether anyone was injured.

The street lighting on that stretch of road is particularly bad. The House authorities are going to quite extraordinary lengths to protect Members of Parliament and their staff—for example, there are eight fire doors between my office and the front door in Millbank. However, as soon as one ventures outside, one takes one's life in one's hands.

Madam Deputy Speaker, will you request the Serjeant at Arms to talk to Westminster city council and/or the Minister for Transport in London about securing better lighting on that stretch of road? That will ensure that we have some hope of surviving when conditions are as treacherous as they were tonight and when drivers are going recklessly fast.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I witnessed the aftermath of the same incident to which the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) referred and I strongly endorse what he said. I do not distinguish between the safety of members of the public and Members of Parliament, but many people go backwards and forwards across that stretch of road at speed—particularly when there are votes in the House—and the lack of safety arrangements is very disturbing.

Tonight the conditions were extremely hazardous. Cars were driving across that pedestrian crossing at speeds of 50 and 60 mph, even while the police were present. It is a tragedy waiting to happen. Since the extension of the parliamentary offices to Millbank, many hon. Members have been aware of the situation. We do not want to investigate a tragedy; we want to pre-empt one.

I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to accept the recommendation of the hon. Member for Salisbury that there should be urgent discussions with the police and with Westminster city council about traffic-calming measures in order to secure effective safety arrangements.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I am concerned to hear what the hon. Members for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) have said. I will certainly ensure that the proper authorities are informed and asked what action they might be prepared to take. We must now continue with the money resolution.

ATOMIC ENERGY AUTHORITY BILL [*Money*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Atomic Energy Authority Bill ('the Act'), it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of the following, namely—

(a) expenses incurred by the Treasury or the Secretary of State in consequence of provision made by the Act for the acquisition of, or of rights to subscribe for, securities of successor companies;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the administrative expenses of the Secretary of State or the Treasury;

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other Act are payable out of money so provided;

(2) the extinguishment of liabilities of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority ('the Authority') in respect of the principal of such relevant loans as may be specified by order to such extent as may be so specified;

(3) the extinguishment of liabilities of a successor company in respect of the principal of such relevant loans as may be specified by order to such extent as may be so specified at a time when the company is wholly owned by the Crown or a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Authority;

(4) the issuing out of the National Loans Fund of sums required by the Secretary of State for making loans to any successor company which is wholly owned by the Crown;

(5) the charging on and issuing out of the Consolidated Fund of sums required by the Treasury for fulfilling such guarantees given by them for the discharge of financial obligations in connection with sums borrowed by any successor company which is wholly owned by the Crown;

(6) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund.

In this Resolution—

'relevant loan'—

(a) in relation to the Authority, means the Authority's commencing capital debt and any loan made to the Authority under section 4 of the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1986,

(b) in relation to a successor company, means any debt or loan mentioned in paragraph (a) above (if and to the extent that the liability to repay it is transferred to the company in accordance with a scheme under the Act) and any loan made to the company by the Secretary of State under the Act;

'successor company' means any company which, at a time when it is wholly owned by the Crown or a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Authority, becomes entitled or subject, in accordance with a scheme under the Act, to any property, rights or liabilities of the Authority.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Coal Industry

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): I beg to move,

That the draft Miners' Welfare Act 1952 (Transfer of Functions of Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 23rd February, be approved.

The immediate purpose of the draft order is to facilitate a change in the organisation and arrangements for coal industry social welfare. Instead of having a Companies Act company, the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation Ltd.—CISWO—at the centre of those arrangements, the aim is to have a charitable trust, the CISWO trust.

This is not a new idea. When CISWO Ltd. was formed in 1952, it had been the intention to register it as a charity, but there was some nervousness that its aims and objectives would conflict with charity law at the time. So the draft order is perhaps implementing the intentions of some 43 years ago. On 10 March, some four days ago, the directors of CISWO Ltd. decided to take that step as part of wider changes consequent on the privatisation of British Coal.

It may be helpful if I remind the House of some of the wider background. The Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation embraces a wide range of activities. To take a few examples, there are between 4,000 and 5,000 recuperative convalescent placements annually, and we know how much those facilities are cherished, such as those at the Bournemouth convalescent home for south Wales miners. There are nearly 12,000 counselling sessions and visits each year by 17 CISWO social volunteers, supported by a virtual army of voluntary helpers and CISWO's organisation of sports and competitions—in part through company sponsorship—for the seriously disabled, as well as the able-bodied, involves an ambitious range of activities.

CISWO provides administrative support to independent miners' welfares and convalescent homes and trusts, including more than 4,000 grants, primarily to widows, from the coal industry benevolent trust for the relief of hardship, and more than 400 grants to miners and dependants pursuing full-time education from the education trust fund.

It was clear from debates in the House last year on the Coal Bill that those services, especially services for the disabled, the old and the infirm were greatly valued.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The Minister has given us a list of CISWO's functions, but he has not mentioned sport and recreation grounds. That issue is yet to be resolved. During tonight's debate, will the Minister give us some indication of his present thinking?

Mr. Page: I made a short reference to CISWO's organisation of sport and competition, but matters dealing specifically with recreation grounds have not yet been decided, although the Government are fully conscious of the importance of recreational grounds. Debates and discussions are taking place between the National Playing

[Mr. Page]

Fields Association, CISWO and British Coal to find a satisfactory solution as to how they can continue to be operated and retained for recreational use.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Minister confirm that all lands which are run by or on behalf of CISWO will remain under the control of the new trust, or is there any risk that such lands, including sports grounds, may be sold off as part of British Coal's plans to privatise its land?

Mr. Page: The land under the control of CISWO will remain under its control unless it reaches a particular agreement with the National Playing Fields Association for that organisation to look after the land. Any terms and arrangements would have to be satisfactory with such an agreement.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The issue is of great concern to mining communities, because for many years miners have contributed to creating that particular wealth and resource. Miners in many of our villages are afraid that the land will be transferred into the general package of sale by British Coal. For instance, the ownership of some land is a little ambiguous because during particular periods miners cleared land and created playing fields on land that then belonged to the private coal industry. The ownership has never been established. Will the Minister either examine the matter very closely or give us some assurance tonight that the facilities that belong to mining communities will not be sold off?

Mr. Page: The Government have given assurances that the land will be maintained for recreational use. As I have said, discussions are taking place between those three bodies. It is a highly complex issue, as hon. Members accept and appreciate, and it has not yet been resolved, but the Government have given a commitment that the land will be retained for recreational use.

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): The Minister mentioned in the preface to his remarks that CISWO was instituted in 1952. CISWO was founded on previous welfare schemes, which were developed by the likes of my grandfather with his halfpennies, my father with his pennies, and me with my shillings when I worked in the industry. Will the Minister consider the tremendous progress made in the county of Durham, where most of those facilities have been transferred at a peppercorn rent to parish councils to be used by miners and their future generations in perpetuity? We believe that that is the best way forward. We have contributed to and maintained those facilities, and we wish to maintain them for future generations.

Mr. Page: I can only agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I have said nothing that does not recognise the tremendous work that CISWO and its predecessors have done in that area. I shall elaborate on that recognition a little later in my speech.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): As the CISWO recreation grounds and welfare halls have been an integral part of mining communities, have any discussions been held with local authorities in those areas about the possibility of their taking over the recreational grounds and welfare halls?

Mr. Page: Certain local authorities have leasehold agreements on that land and will be consulted on the best way forward. The Government have given a clear and firm commitment. I understand hon. Members' concerns, but I can take the matter no further than to say that CISWO is currently negotiating the best way forward.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way yet again. There are two matters that he does not appear to cover. The first is the serious concern of allotment holders on British Coal land. I asked a question of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which responded this morning by saying that it is the business of the Department of Trade and Industry. Will the Minister therefore clear up the whole question of allotment holders? The second, which is tangential but has not been mentioned and is clearly not central to the parties involved, is brass bands.

Mr. Page: I recognise that there is a great deal of concern about allotments. No decisions have yet been made, as discussions are still taking place. The views expressed by the hon. Gentleman are of the kind being taken into consideration in the current discussions. On brass bands, I shall not try to pre-empt the negotiations, but I believe that CISWO is taking a particular interest in that matter and may come forward with an announcement on it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Minister clear up a point that worries all of us? Some valuable land currently being used mainly for recreational and sporting purposes has come out of the ribs of the miners and off the shovel in years gone by. As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) said, that is where the wealth was created. We want an assurance from the Minister that, by passing this order or any other such order, none of that land will be sold off for development, or by some speculator to make some money for whoever wants to develop it, and that the land will remain for recreation and sporting purposes, because the miners in the area provided it for that reason. We want a guarantee.

Mr. Page: The order provides that CISWO recreational land will remain CISWO recreational land. CISWO will discuss the best way forward with the National Playing Fields Association and British Coal, and they must agree any changes in the use of the land. So the matter is entirely in the hands of CISWO. It has the authority and control, and this is the best way for it to proceed.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister is being kind, but I am sure that he will recognise our general fears. Many of the grounds, certainly in the south Wales valleys, have been supported by local collieries that are now closed, and therefore the cost of maintenance has reverted to local welfare organisations or to CISWO itself. If no support is coming from British Coal funds to maintain those grounds, the pressure will be on, if the National Playing Fields Association cannot take them over, for them to be sold. We would like to see moneys put aside or made available so that they can stay in the ownership of the people who provided them.

Mr. Page: Although I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, I do not feel that it would be right for me—I do not

think that I have the power—to tie CISWO's hands in that way. It wants to be a living and growing organisation and it must decide the best way forward for the charity that we are establishing tonight.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Will he tell the House exactly who owns all those different tracts of land? Do they belong to CISWO, the Coal Board or, as has been suggested, the local miners, who may have paid over many years? If my hon. Friend does not have all the answers now to tell the House, perhaps he will write to me.

Mr. Page: I will have to write to my hon. Friend, because the ownership of the land, whether the leases involved were given to local authorities or to organisations at peppercorn rents, will be an immense puzzle to unravel. *[Interruption.]* No. We are not going to withdraw the order, because the order is at the request of and to the benefit of CISWO, and I would be surprised if any hon. Member tonight did not want to give CISWO the opportunity to go forward to become a charity and fulfil the original obligation that was wanted back in 1952.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Page: No, I wish to make some progress.

The Government took careful note of the depth of support for existing services and arranged funding of some £17 million to secure the future of those core services for the disabled, the old and the infirm. The funding falls into two parts: £5 million taking the form of an annual payment of £1 million a year for five years from the new coal companies; and £12 million taking the form of capital endowments from British Coal.

There was also widespread concern on a separate but linked issue, which many hon. Members have raised—namely, recreational facilities.

Ministers gave assurances that British Coal land currently in active use for sports and recreation will be retained for those purposes. That remains our position. I have said that before and say it again. CISWO and the NPFA are closely involved with our discussions with British Coal.

Why should CISWO move to a charitable trust? First, essentially, to improve flexibility. As a Companies Act company, CISWO presides over some 400 area trusts, miners' welfares and convalescent homes, each of which is a trust. Yet it does not enjoy the benefits of charitable status. The change of status increases the range of options for making the best use of resources in the system.

Secondly, CISWO will be looking to a wide range of sources of support and funding. As a charity, it will be well-placed to do that.

The directors of CISWO agreed, in a meeting on 15 February, to a supplemental trust deed. The trust will now be able to perform all the functions of CISWO Ltd. The supplemental deed also puts in place new arrangements for the governance of the CISWO trust.

In brief, there will be three groups of trustees: four will represent employers; four will represent employees; and there will be four general trustees, bringing experience and knowledge of the voluntary sector to the CISWO trust. To ensure continuity in CISWO's strategic direction, four British Coal trustees and four trade union trustees will be appointed as employer and employee trustees.

The role of trustee places substantial obligations and responsibilities on individuals. That will be well appreciated by hon. Members with experience of the voluntary charitable sector. I can say that, having been an honorary treasurer of a national charity. People with knowledge of how charities work and how they best operate are valuable. Therefore, I am pleased that members of the CISWO council, who have guided and supported the activities of CISWO over the years, are prepared to continue their commitment and give their time and energy to the future development of the coal industry's social welfare.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: The Minister referred to four trustees from the employer, four from the employees and another four. Who will be appointing those other four?

Mr. Page: As I understand it, four will come from the trade unions, four from British Coal and four general trustees will bring additional expertise. We must recognise that CISWO is moving on and will require that extra support.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Page: No, I must bring my remarks to a close.

The charitable trust is therefore in place. The specific purpose of the draft order is to enable the transfer of the functions of CISWO Ltd. to that trust in accordance with section 12(3) of the Miners' Welfare Act 1952.

That section provides that if a resolution is passed or an order made for the winding up of CISWO Ltd., any functions of that organisation shall be transferred to such body or person as may be prescribed by an order made by the Secretary of State. Such a resolution was passed on 10 March and I ask hon. Members to support the decision made by CISWO council and trustees of the CISWO trust by affirming the draft order. I commend the draft order to the House.

10.36 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity available to him to reply to the debate. I realise that he has already accepted several interventions, but we spent a fair amount of time on this issue during the passage of the Coal Industry Bill because we considered that the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation played a significant part in the life of coal communities in a number of ways.

As has already been made clear, CISWO is significant because it was set up before the establishment of the welfare state. It started in 1920, partly with funding from management but largely on the basis of funding which came from the men who worked in the industry who, conscious of the inadequacy of the facilities that they had around them, felt it necessary to provide additional services not only for recreation but for the very basis of health and welfare in their communities.

It is therefore with a certain sense of regret and chagrin that we debate the order today. We recognise that, as the ownership of the coal industry has changed, so the basis of funding must change, as it must in so far as the price per tonne has fallen since the demise of the coal industry.

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

Twelve months ago the Government were singing from a rather different hymn sheet from the one that they are using tonight. When the Bill was in its embryonic stage, Opposition Members had a number of discussions with the trustees. The Minister for Energy and Industry met the trustees and it became abundantly clear that he had precious little understanding of the importance and significance of CISWO and its associated organisations' activities.

To some extent the Minister has moved, as he has been made aware of the social welfare organisation—the welfare clubs and the sports facilities. To an extent, we must recognise that that movement has meant that there has been an improvement in the funding of CISWO. We shall have to wait and see whether the improved method of funding will be sufficient to cover the continuing functions of the organisation.

The Minister has paid tribute to the extensive social welfare provisions which still exist. It would be wrong to assume that, because only about 10,000 men are now employed in the coal industry, there are only 10,000 potential beneficiaries; that figure could be multiplied 20 or 30 times, given the families and communities who have depended on the counselling, disablement assistance and grants which have constituted part of the fabric of coal-mining constituencies. It is important for the new funding arrangements to be clear, and for the best use to be made of the money.

The Government have made it clear that they are prepared to provide an endowment of £10 million, which will attract some £600,000 per annum in interest. The licensed operators have committed themselves to contributing £1 million per annum for five years. That will be done on the basis of some form of covenant. Will the Minister assure us that it will be as tax-efficient as possible, so that the nascent charity can benefit fully from the money that the new licensed operators will be required to contribute? I understand that the draft covenant still has some way to go before it can take best advantage of the appropriate tax breaks.

Mr. Enright: I hope that my hon. Friend will deal at some point with British Coal, which none of us trusts. It gave certain undertakings about Frickley colliery. People living in the area who were sold their very small cottages are now left without roads, lighting, cleaning or any other facilities, and we fear that British Coal will do exactly the same in regard to CISWO unless we know who is to appoint the four other trustees. The Minister was coy about that.

Mr. O'Neill: I hope that the Minister will deal with that point when he winds up the debate. I understand that the legislation must also go through the House of Lords, and that the procedure must be completed by 31 March, when there will be a further diminution of the role and responsibilities of British Coal.

I do not think that many Opposition Members—or, I imagine, many Conservative Members who take an interest in the coal industry—have much trust in, or affection for, the rump that constitutes the remainder of British Coal. It has failed to defend the industry and the communities; indeed, it has walked away from them. I am reluctant to say this, but it almost bears testimony to the campaign that was waged by Opposition Members and the trustees of CISWO that the Minister was able to give CISWO some support. Indifference has been the hallmark of the commitment given by British Coal in the recent past.

We are concerned about the nature of the funds from the new licensed operators. We want to ensure that they are as tax-efficient as possible. We also want guarantees from the Government that if any of the licensed operators for any reason default on the payments that they are required to provide, adequate steps will be taken to ensure that the money is forthcoming. Already, in the three months since the change in the coal industry pension schemes, a number of the new, smaller operators—not the three licensed operators mentioned earlier—have reneged on their commitments to the miners' pension schemes. They are defaulting on their payments. We therefore require clear and express guarantees that the Government will undertake correct policing to ensure that the charity is able to expect the funds that the licensed operators have committed themselves to making available. One expects that that might be one of the first things that they would default on if they got into difficulty.

We are told that the threat of licence withdrawal will be the Coal Authority's greatest sanction against licensed operators, but we are concerned that they may not come up with the goods. It may be only £100,000, but such sums are critical to the funding of CISWO. We need guarantees that the back-sliding that has taken place in relation to pension scheme contributions will not take place in this context.

Land is the other point that has exercised most hon. Members. We are talking here not about wee parcels of land dotted around the country, but about 1,000-acre areas, many of them located in prime sites in mining communities. Those sites could be used for industrial or housing developments, but they are desperately required to provide adequate social and welfare facilities.

The Minister was somewhat disingenuous in his replies. I understand that his officials have arrived at an agreement with CISWO that the terms of the leasing of land are cut and dried. The Under-Secretary of State and the Minister for Energy and Industry have yet to put their signatures to the agreement. What the Under-Secretary of State has said today is not good enough. He has not made his point in any threatening way, but he should recognise that Opposition Members know that they are up against the clock. that 31 March is the date by which this has to be signed, sealed and delivered, and that the statutory instrument must be agreed today so that it can go to the Lords and complete its passage.

We do not understand why the Minister is not prepared to go the extra yard to secure the agreement and to allay the anxieties of my colleagues and of many people engaged in sporting, welfare and recreational activities across the country. It would not take much. We want to know what is required and why he has yet to do it. The impression that we get is that it is somehow up to the welfares, but that is not the case: it is up to the Minister to come across.

I take second place to few people in my appreciation of the distance that the Government have already travelled. At one stage, we expected the demise of the welfares and we were concerned about what would happen to the myriad activities for which they are responsible. It would be a shame and a disgrace if those

activities were denied to mining communities simply because of the inability or unwillingness of the Minister to get off his backside and to argue with his colleagues in Government to secure the last piece of the jigsaw and to get CISWO on a good footing.

The improvement in the deal is in large measure due to the work of the trustees. We are concerned to ensure that the people who will have the sizeable responsibility for taking care of a substantial amount of money and for myriad social working activities and other matters will be accepted and trusted by the mining communities. We should like a greater degree of frankness from the Minister as to who will appoint those people and what their credentials will be. We want to ensure that they will enjoy the trust of all people involved in mining. I doubt whether many people currently working at or associated with Hobart house and British Coal would be included in the list of the great and good from which the names will be taken. I doubt whether all the trade union organisations will enjoy the greatest degree of confidence across the spectrum of mining communities. I would certainly be concerned if there was not a truly representative group from the other element in this—the communities. People from the communities will be aware of, sympathetic to and enjoy the confidence of those communities.

At this late stage I want to mention what we have achieved. I use the word "we" because my colleagues on the Standing Committee, those who fought the Bill on the Floor of the House and all our colleagues in the trade union movement went a great distance to secure the compromises and advances embodied in the order and I should hate the ship to sink for the lack of a ha'porth of tar. This is important to the areas that many of us are privileged to represent, to those who have given their lives and to families who have given substantial parts of their weekly wage to ensure that there were common facilities in the communities. We want to ensure that that communitarian tradition will be sustained and that it is in the hands of people whom we know and trust. We want the Minister to assure us as to the manner of the financing and the way in which the guarantees will be established; we want an assurance that the land will be available to our people in perpetuity and that those who will have overall responsibility will be people whom we know and trust.

10.51 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) referred to the Coal Industry Bill, which explored a number of important issues. There are three main issues that we need to clarify: first, funding; secondly, the suitable structure; and, thirdly, the leasing of the recreation land.

The Minister said that there would be four trustees from the union side, four from the management side and four other trustees to be appointed. I am sure that he is aware that previously there was always an even number of trustees from management, an even number from the union and a rotating chair, so things have changed. There may be, for example, a disagreement over land. The union trustees would be easily outvoted on that sort of issue. We are concerned that the situation has changed so radically and we hope that the Minister will elaborate on the arrangements for the trustees when he replies.

Another issue of concern is funding, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan referred. Funding is significant because of the important role that CISWO has played in mining communities. It does a great deal of work for disabled and sick people and for the disadvantaged generally.

The funding is insufficient. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan explained, over the first five years, there is £1.65 million. That is much less than previously. It means that many of the services that CISWO has offered in the past will no longer be provided. In the sixth year, things become even more dire. Between the sixth and ninth years, the amount per year will decrease from £1.65 million to £1.63 million. I understand that it has been suggested that the trustees should be able to raise £500,000 between the sixth and ninth years to augment the moneys from the annuity. At the same time, I understand that a special expenditure fund is to be drawn on, which will be exhausted by the 10th year. In effect, CISWO will face a very difficult situation by that 10th year because, no matter how enthusiastic the trustees are, raising £500,000 a year for a good number of years—at least six years—will tax that enthusiasm. It is rather unlikely that they will be able to continue raising such amounts of money.

Does the Minister have plans for further funding? Are there plans, for example, to assist CISWO from the sixth year to the ninth year if the trustees are unable to raise £500,000 each year? What plans does he have for after the 10th year?

There is also great concern over leased land. Much of it is leased from British Coal. The Minister will be aware that we withdrew some of the amendments to the Coal Industry Bill on the basis of assurances that we were given. It now appears that some of those assurances may not, in some respects, be fulfilled in the way in which we thought they might. For example, we were given to believe that some of the land might be transferred to the Coal Authority, yet when the Minister opened the debate, he made no mention of that.

I shall draw the Minister's attention to two great concerns in my constituency. First, the North Gawber welfare is currently in receivership, but its football pitch is used regularly by the community. Will the Minister ensure that that football pitch is kept as a leisure amenity in the community? Secondly, there is concern regarding land in the village of Worsborough. The girl guides' camp is on a piece of land covering 3.34 acres which is owned by British Coal. The area is regularly used and it is important to the village. I hope that if the Minister cannot give an answer at the Dispatch Box, he will be prepared to look into the matter with a view to ensuring that the land is handed over to CISWO. If that is not possible, the land should go to the local authority.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): My hon. Friend is being typically modest when he refers to some of the CISWO land in his constituency. Will he reflect on one of the cricket pitches in his constituency in the village of Cawthorne, which traditionally wins the title of the best kept village in Yorkshire? For a village in Yorkshire, that is no mean achievement. Will he reflect on the fact that a number of private entrepreneurs would like to buy the cricket pitch in Cawthorne from CISWO? The cricket pitch is a marvellous village amenity and is likely to be

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sold to the private sector if there are four union trustees, four management trustees and four trustees from the voluntary sector—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. This is a very long intervention and it is time that the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) was allowed to resume his speech.

Mr. Illsley: I would just like to ask my hon. Friend—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. No more.

Mr. Clapham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for prompting me. Cawthorne cricket club rests in a very beautiful part of Yorkshire, in a small village, and property developers have had their eye on it. The issue may well have to be determined by the vote of the trustees. The interests of the community may take second place to business interests, which may influence the vote of the trustees. We are concerned about the composition of the trustees. We would be much happier with the previous structure of an even number of trustees and a chair by rotation.

I ask the Minister for an assurance that the lands that are leased from British Coal will be handed to CISWO and that the two areas in my constituency to which I have referred will continue to be available for recreation.

11 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We are having to discuss these matters because of the privatisation of the coal industry. It is a pity that the Tory rebels were not around at the time. They could have joined us and prevented the privatisation from taking place. Perhaps it is futile to think along those lines when pits have shut throughout Britain. They are still closing. I hear that one in Nottingham is on the skids.

We have seen the devastation of mining communities. We now find that the welfare organisation, with its grounds and recreation facilities, is placed in jeopardy. It is little wonder that we are greatly concerned about the order to deal with CISWO and its activities on behalf of the injured, including paraplegics. I have in mind visiting, for example.

The recreation grounds could be called the glamour part of CISWO. Most people know about the cricket and football grounds. We are talking of grounds where the Charltons played and where Kevin Keegan learnt his trade. Some of the most famous English cricketers used the grounds during the early years of their careers. Those of us who represent mining communities are here tonight to defend the grounds. We are anxious to ensure that a tradition continues.

We are naturally peeved that the pits have gone. We have a duty to protect local amenities in what were mining areas. It has already been said that all the amenities were provided by miners in the past. They were not provided by the Budges of this world. Budge has made no contribution to the welfare amenities. He has produced nothing.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): He has opened some pits.

Mr. Skinner: He has helped to close them.

The welfare facilities have come from miners over generations. Along comes R. J. Budge and, from what we have heard, it seems that he will recommend about half the CISWO trustees. It is a fine state of affairs when the man is operating on a shaky financial basis. He won a tender on one of the most crooked proposals in any privatisation package. He makes a £900 million bid and wins the tender. He then has discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry and the bid is reduced by £100 million. The fellow will be able to have four of his henchmen on CISWO. We cannot be satisfied with what the Minister has told us about the trustees. Where will they come from? How many of them will be scabs? How many will come via Mr. R. J. Budge and such people?

The net result will be that the whole thing will turn into a Tory quango. The Minister has not satisfied us. In a few years, or in an even shorter time, some of the welfares will be cherry-picked. They will be sold off and there will be yuppies in every pit village, who will gradually change the cricket and football grounds into parts of leafy suburbialand. They will have pampas grass in the gardens.

We are not satisfied with what the Minister said. We know that there is a 31 March deadline, but unless he can give us satisfactory answers and a guarantee that no land will be sold, and unless we hear today who the trustees will be and who will appoint them, some of us feel that we have no alternative but to oppose the order.

11.5 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): My speech will be short, too. I am disappointed that the Minister is not sitting beside the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy, because he, like us, went through the Bill with a fine-toothed comb. He was the one who gave us many of the assurances that such problems would not arise.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), I was under the impression that the land would be given to the new Coal Authority, yet all of a sudden we found out that British Coal was auctioning it all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) said that he had paid for these assets. In fact, we all paid for them. At Roslin colliery, the first colliery where I worked, the baths and the bicycle sheds were provided by CISWO through the men's contributions. They were then transferred to the jurisdiction of British Coal. Many of the assets were paid for by the men and the communities themselves. Even when we talk about a few collieries, the House must realise that thousands of people provided the assets there.

Those assets—the miners' welfares and recreational facilities—make life tolerable in the villages to which they belong. Many of the individuals who, quite rightly, take advantage of them have given their lives and their health to the industry. They are worried about the future and about what is happening to CISWO.

The Minister had given me the impression that the facilities were protected and the land would remain, but now I wonder what is happening to the money paid for the land being sold by British Coal. Is it going into a central fund or will it go directly to the Treasury? Those are the questions that worry and frustrate us. Will the money gained from the cherry picking that will take place go to the Treasury, too?

Sometimes the assets can become liabilities, and local authorities cannot inherit them without some sort of grant to get them into condition and to provide for their upkeep and maintenance. There is not the money for people to contribute directly to the funds now, because most of those who use the facilities are retired or redundant miners and their families.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) that the order is a leap forward—indeed, it is a light year forward from what we were offered originally. I agree that it is constructive. But, like everybody in all parts of the British coalfield, I am worried that we may again be being hived off as a problem. The Government wanted to privatise the coal industry, so they had to get rid of us awkward characters who were worried about our communities.

I am sorry that the Minister has to answer the debate; but he is a member of the Government, so he should answer it. There are questions that need to be answered and blank spaces that need to be filled in by the Government and by the Minister in this debate. I hope that, if he does not have the answers now, we will get them in the future. I also hope that dialogue will continue even after the motion is passed today.

11.9 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): It would be churlish not to recognise the movement that has been made on CISWO. When the debate on British Coal started, there was real anxiety among some of us that the Government did not understand the value of CISWO and thought that they could discard it. I am pleased that we have moved to a position where there will be a charitable trust and CISWO is to be funded.

We will return to the issues because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) said, the funding is relatively short term, and I am anxious about the future of CISWO. It has been given a lifeboat, but times are difficult in the coalfield communities and we may well have to revisit this part of funding in 10 years' time.

The problems of the coalfields will not go away. It is okay for people to talk about regeneration, but we must understand that that regeneration will take time. The recreational land about which we have talked to the Minister is important as part of that regeneration. We must try to nail the issue tonight, because the trust will be set up from 31 March. The clock is ticking and assets must be transferred into that new charitable trust.

There are three problems about the land. First, it is my impression that British Coal frankly does not know what it owns. An example of that is the allotment land by the old Linby colliery site, where there has been an absolute denial of ownership of those allotments. British Coal says that it does not own the land, and that the county council owns it. The county council, however, denies that it owns the land.

I note that British Coal is taking rents from allotment holders. It is vital that British Coal decides quickly who owns the land and transfers those lands and properties. One of the problems is that, in the rush to privatise and get rid of British Coal, the staff have been left in flux. There is nobody there to do the work, and the issues need to be resolved quickly.

Secondly, I must draw the Minister's attention to the issue of allotments. If he wants to have a fight, he can take on the allotment holders of England who are firmly tied to that land. There has been no consideration at all of what will happen to allotment land. Can the Minister give us an assurance tonight that allotments will be transferred across to CISWO and that we can then talk about the kind of co-operatives and partnerships we might need to keep the allotment holders happy? My postbag is full of letters from allotment holders. If the Minister wants a fight, they will take him on, and they are a powerful group to consider.

Finally, while we are talking about recreational land, it is clear that advanced discussions have taken place between British Coal, CISWO and the National Playing Fields Association. I have the impression—the Minister may tell me that I am wrong—that a schedule has been drawn up. That needs ratification. Yet the clock is ticking. We have an opportunity tonight to question the Minister about the way forward for the land. Can he not give us a little more clarity about what will happen? What land will go to CISWO? What will go to the National Playing Fields Association? My colleagues speak with passion on those subjects because we have seen the passing of British Coal. We want to maintain the best traditions of the mining communities. CISWO can embody that. It can be a step into the future.

I hope that the Minister will do his best to reassure not only us but coalfield communities, which have had a tough time in the past few years and now look for some real messages of hope.

11.15 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I should like to take the Minister back to his opening submission. He said that the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation was a limited company formed in 1952 under the Miners' Welfare Act 1952. He went on to say that it had never achieved charitable status with the charity commissioners as a result of an oversight or mistake. I think that those were his words. He will intervene if I have got that wrong.

I should like to take issue with the Minister on that one point, which goes to the heart of the matter. I do not for one minute believe that anyone forgot to register CISWO as a charitable organisation with the charity commissioners. I believe that CISWO was set up as a company for a particular reason. I suggest to the Minister that CISWO was set up as a company by the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers. They had an equal number of shares and made an equal contribution to funding. The chair of the company rotated from the National Coal Board to the National Union of Mineworkers in alternate years. I could be wrong, but the Minister might want to answer that point when he replies to the debate.

I have a little experience of CISWO as I once applied to be its chief executive. In applying for that position, I went in some detail into the structure of CISWO. I dispute

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the assertion that someone in CISWO overlooked the fact that it had to seek charitable status with the charity commissioners rather than be set up as a limited company.

Let us take the matter a stage further and consider why CISWO should have been a limited company rather than a charity. To do so we have to examine trust law and charity law and consider whether a body can achieve charitable status with the charity commissioners for a tightly defined group of beneficiaries. Will the charity commissioners accept an application for charitable status where the beneficiaries are solely mineworkers? I suggest that in 1952 the charity commissioners would not grant charitable status to a group of beneficiaries restricted solely to mineworkers and their families, hence the need for a limited company. There was never any intention for CISWO to seek charitable status, which the Minister says it overlooked.

Under the order, we are now to leap from a limited company set up in 1952 to a new CISWO, a new charity. I understand that the application for charitable status has already been accepted by the charity commissioners. The terms are that there will be four trustees from the mineworkers' unions, four trustees from management and four trustees from certain voluntary organisations which the Minister has not identified. He has not even identified a range of voluntary organisations from which those four trustees could come.

We move on from there being a limited company whose directors are equally divided between the union and the company, with a rotating chairman. There are now three groups—a union group, a management group and a separate group. Let us consider each group in turn.

There are now two unions—the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and the National Union of Mineworkers, a split group with four trusteeships. On the management side, four trusteeships are available to 29 or 30 different companies. Several private companies now operate in the mining industry, the most well-known of which is RJB Mining, but in South Wales and other areas there are many private companies. There are four trusteeships among a great many companies there.

There are four trusteeships for charities, of which the only one mentioned this evening is the National Playing Fields Association, which has never previously been in the ball game, as far as I can remember. Why should the National Playing Fields Association be included? We are talking not only about playing fields, but about substantial land holdings, miners' welfare premises, licensed premises, clubs, pubs and so on.

In one leap we go from a company with an even spread of directors from the NUM, British Coal and the National Coal Board, to a charity with trustees who are appointed from three separate areas.

CISWO's property holdings give some cause for concern. Its property holdings in mining areas are specific to those mining areas but it also has fields—substantial property holdings that could be attractive to outside bodies.

The split of trustees—four from management, four from the unions, four from voluntary organisations—means that the unions, which traditionally represented the opinions of the mining areas and previously held 50 per cent. of the vote, can no longer voice those opinions in the new organisation. They can be overruled, so the wishes of mining areas are likely to be overruled.

Contrary to what my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) suggested—that we could be seeking funding in about 10 years' time—the new charity may sell off the assets of CISWO very quickly, not to local authorities inside whose boundaries those assets are situated, but to the highest bidder, not for leisure purposes but for development. I give the Minister an example that occurred in my constituency recently, whereby a brewery applied for planning permission to build houses on a bowling green alongside a public house. It wanted to do away with a leisure facility and build houses on what has been a bowling green for many years. That is the sort of situation that may confront us.

Will the Minister explain why CISWO is to become a charity? Why cannot it remain a company? Why is CISWO now subject to three different groups of trustees? When was it agreed that four of its trustees should come from the voluntary sector, as opposed to the trustees being derived from management and the unions within the industry? Why are trustees from outside being thrust upon CISWO? Will assets now be sold off to the highest bidder in the private sector because the trustees who represent mining areas—that is, trustees from the mining unions—will be out-voted?

11.24 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): My remarks will be brief because other hon. Members have already made many important points.

The process of privatisation has been very traumatic for mining communities throughout the country. Retired miners in north Warwickshire have been extremely concerned about what will happen to the many facilities that they use and upon which they base their entire social lives.

Those retired miners will hold their annual general meeting tomorrow morning to discuss, among other things, the future of Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation Ltd. They will be concerned to receive answers to the questions that my hon. Friends have asked tonight. I think that they will appreciate that the Government have moved a long way since the privatisation process began.

The order appears to rush the process and, in that rush, there is a danger that certain questions may be left unanswered. On the face of it, they may not appear to be particularly important questions; but they may give rise to issues which may involve the new trust in legal complexity and controversy which would severely obstruct its ability to undertake the tasks that it has been set up to perform.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I wonder whether my hon. Friend has the same problems in his constituency as I have in mine. There is an agreement between CISWO and the local authority about the mining welfare facility in my constituency, which was extended by the local authority. It is organised and run on a trustee basis by the local authority and CISWO trustees. I understand that there are about 500 similar agreements throughout the country. Local authorities are already under financial pressure and are concerned about their continued

operation and when CISWO also comes under pressure the demands to dispose of those facilities will become intense.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. Unless many of those issues are addressed—and, in undertaking this process, the Government have a responsibility to address them and to come up with some clear answers, if not tonight then as soon as possible thereafter—CISWO may experience a great deal of difficulty in carrying out its designated duties, in terms of not only its various agreements with local authorities but its dealings in leased land under private ownership. All those legal problems must be resolved sooner rather than later.

In his reply, I hope that the Minister will address the legal problem that he ducked earlier. He must set out clearly how the trustees—particularly the trade union trustees—will be selected.

My final point was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping). Allotments are one of the main issues that concern many retired miners. I very much hope that we can have some clear answers on what will happen to those allotments and on what promises and undertakings the Government can make to allotment holders that their future will be protected.

11.29 pm

Mr. Page: In opening the debate, I commended the commitment given and pledged again by the council and trustees of CISWO. I was born in Tredegar in south Wales, so I am not unaware of the role of the coal industry in that society and the role fulfilled by the various miners' welfares. The advisers and staff of CISWO, led by their chief executive, Mr. Vernon Jones, must also be commended. They have borne a heavy burden of additional work in recent months in preparing the transfer of activities from the company to the trust and for the future of the trust.

It may be helpful if I say to the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) that when CISWO Ltd. was formed in 1952, the intention was to register it as a charity, but there was a degree of apprehension and nervousness that its aims and objectives on the recreational side would not have been compatible with charity law at the time. That was why it would not become a charitable trust.

Mr. Illsley: I wonder whether the Minister heard what I said. The charity commissioners would not accept the charity with such narrow charitable objectives as those available only for mine workers and their families, hence the decision to stick with limited company status.

Mr. Page: I believe that the hon. Gentleman said that it was never the intention to form it as a charity. The original intention was to form it as a charity, but the trustees had to go down the limited liability route for the very reasons on which the hon. Gentleman and I now agree.

At the same time, CISWO has been able to maintain the complex and dynamic range of services for which it has become well respected over the years. It has been planning for the future.

There will be four representatives from the employees, four from the employers and four other independent trustees. The employees will appoint four representatives, those from the employers will be appointed by British Coal and the service is for five years. On the four that will be from the independent sector, the Government are in discussion with CISWO to choose suitable people that can provide the advice from the voluntary sector to which I referred in my opening speech. Therefore, 12 people will be working together to move the charity forward. After their term of five years, they will be in a position to replicate themselves and move on.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) asked about particular sites. It will come as no surprise to him that I do not have a clue about the individual cases that he mentioned. I shall certainly take him up on his offer that I write to him, although I repeat that the Government have given assurances that all lands in active recreational use will be maintained, and that any land leased from British Coal, for example, for recreational use will go either to the National Playing Fields Association or to CISWO. That is the position, but I shall write to him about the individual cases.

Mr. Illsley: Before the Minister moves on, may I bring him back to the point about charitable status? At the start of his reply to the debate, he mentioned that it was thought in 1952 that perhaps CISWO could not achieve charitable status. Why can the company achieve charitable status now, but it could not in 1952, when there were other worries? Why has it achieved charitable status quickly now under privatisation, when it could not do so under nationalisation?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman seeks devious reasons at every available opportunity. I hate to disappoint him, but it may have crossed his mind that one or two laws have been passed which have changed the status of charities and enabled CISWO to become a charitable trust.

Mr. Illsley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Page: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head, because that is the answer.

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) mentioned allotments. I know to my cost how dear that issue is to many people. British Coal's original intention was to put allotments into the parcels of land to be sold. I can give the hon. Gentleman some good news: Ministers were unhappy about that proposal and have asked British Coal to reconsider its position. The hon. Gentleman's words tonight will ring in my ears when the details come before me.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He has been generous in doing so today. He assured us, and we have, of course, taken him at his word, that legislation on charities has changed to enable CISWO to undertake what it previously could not. Will he assure us that, if difficulties arise, or if his advice is not as clear as he thought, legislation will be passed as quickly as possible to enable CISWO to do what I hope we both want it to do?

Mr. Page: I cannot assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government would come behind CISWO if everything went wrong because I believe that the funding is a generous settlement, which should guarantee CISWO's services well into the future. CISWO itself appreciates that it must be able to stand on its own two feet. It will have charitable status and, as I have some experience of

[Mr. Page]

charitable work, I know what can be achieved when an organisation moves into that area. As a national charity, more fund-raising opportunities will be open to it, such as company donations; sponsorships; grants from other charities, foundations and trusts; local and central Government grants to support specific services; and individual covenants and endowments. I know how much money can come in from endowments and the work that can be done to get those additions to the charity's income.

Mr. O'Neill: In the light of the Minister's experience, is he satisfied that the arrangement that has been entered into by the new licensed operators is the most tax efficient? Will he assure us that there will be guarantees against defaulting by any of those who are required to contribute to that new financial arrangement?

Mr. Page: Had the hon. Gentleman held on for a split second, he would have seen that I was about to come to that subject.

Mr. O'Neill: I grew tired of waiting.

Mr. Page: I know, but there we are. The covenant forms are a question for the companies, and it will be for the companies to work with CISWO to agree the best method. They are obliged to pass over the sums of money concerned, which is what they will do. On financial failure and guarantees, the Government will not be in a position to provide the guarantees that the hon. Gentleman seeks. But, in granting the licences in the first place, I do not believe that the situation that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about can even be contemplated.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the pressure of time, given that the 31st is the deadline. I can look him straight in the eye and say that, if some agreement has been reached and CISWO is working it out, it has not yet crossed my desk. I have had no sight of it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman must restrain himself slightly because, on the basis of what he said this evening, I shall make that the first question that I shall ask tomorrow morning.

In bringing this order to a conclusion, I pay special tribute also to the many supporters and voluntary helpers in the coalfield communities who have effectively helped to deliver the services by CISWO to those convalescent homes and day centres. Their work is vital and well appreciated. Long may it continue.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 111, Noes 29.

Division No. 103] **[11.29 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bates, Michael
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Merchant, Piers
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Mitchell and
Dr. Liam Fox.

NOES

Alton, David
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Donohoe, Brian H
Godman, Dr Norman A
Graham, Thomas
Hall, Mike
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Illsley, Eric
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCartney, Ian
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Pike, Peter L
Rendel, David
Simpson, Alan
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Miners' Welfare Act 1952 (Transfer of Functions of Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 23rd February, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Parliamentary Constituencies (Wales) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th February, be approved.

That the draft Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th February, be approved.

HOVERCRAFT

That the draft Hovercraft (Application of Enactments) (Amendment) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENT

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

COURT OF AUDITORS

That this House takes note of OJ C327, the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors concerning the financial year 1993, together with the institutions' replies; and supports the Government's efforts to improve Community financial management.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, if the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed; and that as soon as the proceedings on any Resolution come to by the House on Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill [*Money*] have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

AGRICULTURE

Ordered,

That Mr. Christopher Gill be discharged from the Agriculture Committee and Sir Roger Moate be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Mackay, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Ordered,

That Mr. John Sykes be discharged from the National Heritage Committee and Mr. Nigel Waterson be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Mackay, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

11.50 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I have much pleasure in presenting the petition, which has 1,250 signatures.

The Panshanger Community Action Group of Welwyn Garden City in the County of Hertfordshire Declares that it is deeply concerned that the proposed chemical machining process in the premises of Messrs TKR International Ltd will pose unreasonable and unacceptable risks to the health and safety of the residents of the area and in particular to their children who attend nearby schools.

It also Declares that the process, (which will use considerable amounts of nitric and hydrofluoric acids and will release a substantial quantity of chlorinated hydrocarbon solvent directly into the environment) is an entirely unsuitable one for a small factory estate with light industry and storage warehouses together with a major food distribution centre. Furthermore, it should be recognized that the factory has many houses and allotments in very close proximity and that there are three schools within a few hundred metres of the site.

The group is also seriously concerned that the transport by road of concentrated acids and solvents and their storage and security on site, together with the removal of toxic and hazardous waste by road tanker will present an unreasonable and continuing health hazard to the residents and children of the area.

The Petitioners therefore respectfully ask the House of Commons to request Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution to refuse a licence for the process as proposed, to be carried out in Welwyn Garden City to the detriment of Her Majesty's loyal subjects.

The Committee of The Panshanger Action Group acting on behalf of the residents of the area respectfully present this petition and remain,

Yours faithfully

M Brunning

J Brunning

F Grover

E A Grover.

To lie upon the Table.

Nitrate-vulnerable Zones

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

11.52 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss, in particular, the nitrate-vulnerable zone at Nayland which affects my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo).

I welcome my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to the debate, but I do not envy him his position. Researching for the debate, I thought that I had uncovered a new and interesting topic in the implementation of nitrate-vulnerable zones, but it turns out that the saga has been running for a long time. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is responsible neither for the period in which his Department was sponsoring discussions on the relevant directive in the European Community, nor for the implementation of the directive, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Why on earth has my hon. Friend been put in such an invidious position, given that he has very little responsibility for what I am about to discuss? The problem with nitrate-vulnerable zones at Nayland and elsewhere is that they have unquantifiable adverse effects on land and asset values of farms. The important question that we should ask about the implementation of the directive is whether it is effective and fair.

The basis of the directive is simply to limit nitrates in rivers and water courses so that nitrates do not concentrate in the water supply during abstraction. Sadly, that was effectively rubbished in a debate on 1 November 1989. As soon as the subject of today's debate appeared on the Order Paper, colleagues who have been in Parliament for considerably longer than I started sending me all the material that had been available for many years. On 1 November 1989, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) drew attention in column 434 of *Hansard* to a House of Lords report.

Nitrates are said to have caused blue baby syndrome and stomach cancer, but the House of Lords report said that blue baby syndrome had become

"virtually non-existent in Western Europe".

In the past 35 years, there have been a mere 14 cases in the UK, the last of which was in 1972. The only recorded death was in 1950, when the nitrate level in the water was found to be 885 mg per litre. The directive sets a limit of nearly 50 mg per litre, but that did not trouble the authors of the directive.

The House of Lords report went on to rubbish the idea that a connection existed between nitrates in water and stomach cancer, pointing out in particular that, where nitrate concentrations in water are highest—that includes regions in my constituency and in east England—the incidence of stomach cancer is one of the lowest. Having been successfully rubbished in 1989, the directive subsequently became enacted as law, as is the way with the European Community legislative machine.

The pressure for the directive involved environmental correctness more than practical benefit. I want to consider the implementation of the directive, the methodology of which compounds the impracticality. It depends on regular measurements in water courses. If less than 5 per cent. of those measurements fail the test and show more than 50 parts per million in the water, a nitrate-vulnerable zone for the catchment area of the water course is not needed, but if the measurements exceed that number, a nitrate-vulnerable zone is needed.The tests in relation to the nitrate-vulnerable zone in Nayland were conducted in 1992. From the particular abstraction point used, the water failed the test on a number of occasions.

The techniques used to measure nitrates in the water are interesting.The National Rivers Authority and Anglian Water sampled the same water, apparently using the same method, at Clapham on the great River Ouse in 1992 and 1993. On several occasions, the difference in the measurements were substantial. On one occasion, they differed by 14 per cent., on another by 10 per cent., on another by 86 per cent., and on another by 10.6 per cent. Occasionally, one tester recorded a fail and another recorded a pass. Clearly, a problem exists in terms of the way in which the measurements are taken. Some statistical adjustment is needed to reflect the probability of inaccuracy in the information, but the implementation of the directive has not taken care of that.

Having established by that rather unreliable method that a nitrate-vulnerable zone would be necessary, the boundaries of the zone were drawn up. It is difficult to establish any causal link between the agricultural practices in the Nayland nitrate vulnerable zone, as it is being provisionally designated, and the nitrate content in the water courses because the concentration of nitrates in the water courses occur at unpredictable times—sometimes when the flows are high and sometimes when they are low. That means that it is difficult to be fair or objective about what the boundaries of the nitrate-vulnerable zone should be.

In the Nayland zone, it is evident that very little nitrate is being used in farming. A total of 50 per cent. of the land is used for purposes which do not require fertiliser application at all. The grassland is almost all managed within the Suffolk river valleys environmentally sensitive area, so there is no intensive grazing. There is no intensive livestock or pig rearing. Furthermore, for some years farming practice in the area has been conducted on the basis of the minimum appropriate nitrate application, with those applications being made at the time of maximum take-up of nitrogen by plants.

The high nitrate readings at the Langham intake—the abstraction point from which the samples were taken—are unlikely to be influenced by the imposition of the proposed zone, particularly bearing in mind that the code of good agricultural practice is already being operated by those who farm in the proposed zone.

That raises the question whether the directive is being implemented by designating this nitrate-vulnerable zone and, if it is not being implemented, what changes are likely to be required, either in the short term when the Government admit that the objectives of the directive are not being fulfilled or when the whole thing comes up for review in the future.

I can inform my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State that I took up all these concerns, along with representatives of the National Farmers Union and an

agricultural consultant, at a meeting with my noble Friend Earl Howe, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, kindly organised by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South. My noble Friend took on board our main concerns and acknowledged that there were difficulties with the directive. In response to a letter that I wrote to him, he replied:

"I can assure you that the Government does have a great deal of sympathy with your concerns about the Directive and that is why we tried to use"—

I emphasise "tried"—

"the flexibility contained within the Directive to keep the designations to a minimum."

I am grateful for the efforts of colleagues at the Ministry to try to contain the damage caused by the directive. We went through the gamut of the problems with my noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and he listened sympathetically. However, I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to get in touch with his colleagues at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to ask about the latest timing for implementation of the Nayland nitrate-vulnerable zone. I should be grateful if he would ask whether there is any possibility that there will be changes in the criteria for implementation before the next four-year review. That remains a concern of the NFU in particular.

I am told that some recent letters to Ministers appear to extend the criteria to river catchments where the nitrate level could exceed—rather than has already exceeded—the threshold. That is contrary to the relevant paragraph of the proposal document and to the proposals themselves, where all 11 existing river catchments put forward actually exceeded the threshold in 1992. My guess is that the Government are having difficulty reconciling this minimalist approach with the overall objectives of the directive.

Then there is the whole question of what will happen when the matter is reviewed again in four years' time. When it emerges that there is no connection between farming in the nitrate-vulnerable zones and the effects on nitrate content and that there are still readings above the prescribed limit, we may well find that there is pressure on the Government to extend the zones further—to what effect, I am not absolutely certain, as it is extremely difficult to tell what connection there is between the nitrate content of the water and the farming practices on the land.

A note from the Library informs me:

"It is worth stressing that although fertilisers are based on nitrates, the problem of excess nitrates in drinking water in some areas does not, in a simple sense, derive from farmers using too much fertiliser which is washed away by rain directly into the water supply. Much nitrate leaching derives from the ploughing up of grassland years ago and there is little that can be done to prevent the nitrates from slowly trickling into the water supply."

Indeed, research which has been done since the whole issue arose shows that it may take 20 years for the effects of changed farming practices to be reflected in the nitrate content of water courses.

What are the solutions to the position in which we find ourselves? The obvious solution would be to seek a change in the directive. I understand that my colleagues in the Government have already sought to change the target level of nitrates in drinking water and in water courses from an absolute limit of 50 parts per million to an average of 50 parts per million. That may well have been the original intention of the directive, as the World Health Organisation prescribes an absolute limit of 100 parts per million and is satisfied with an average of 50 parts per million in drinking water.

I return to the point that it may have been the European Commission's fit of environmental correctness which encouraged it to go for the highest standards of drinking water and river water in the world, albeit at disproportionate cost. I understand that my colleague the Member of the European Parliament for North Essex and South Suffolk, Anne McIntosh, has already tabled a question to the Commission on this subject and that the Commission has absolutely no intention of proposing any alteration either to the drinking water directive or to the nitrates directive. That leaves us in a bind.

The only alternative would be to challenge the matter in the European Court. I reckon that there are two grounds on which the directive may be challenged. The first is subsidiarity. On what basis does the international application of the directive justify itself when we are dealing with rivers on our side of the North sea and rivers on the other side of the North sea? Hon. Members may be interested to learn that the North sea is the issue of concern. Concern has been raised about the incursion of excessive nutrients into the North sea, which is affecting pollution there.

To be realistic, the River Stour, which runs through my constituency, represents a rather minor element of pollution in the North sea. Some figures from the Library on the River Rhine, which is obviously a very large river, show that although its total nitrogen content is very low, it is estimated that the Rhine and the Meuse between them contributed about 50 per cent. of the total nitrogen load, compared with about 10 per cent. from all the UK rivers which run into the North sea. Unfortunately, although subsidiarity was used—possibly—as a test to justify the directive, we find that the directive is being driven by the concerns of other continental countries which do not apply much to us. That would explain MAFF's minimalist interpretation and implementation of it. That first challenge would probably fail because of the concerns of other countries.

The other challenge that we could mount is a test of proportionality. From speaking to MAFF officials and others, it is clear to me that the directive is right out of proportion with what it seeks to achieve. The 50 parts per million limit is disproportionately expensive compared with the objective that we are trying to achieve, and the means of achieving the objective are disproportionate and inappropriate to its achievement.

We are rather undermined in any challenge in the European Court because, despite what some MAFF officials have attempted to lead us to believe, the Government were not outvoted on the directive. It was not imposed on the Government—we supported it. It was agreed unanimously. That was made clear to me in a letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Whereas my right hon. Friend seems enthusiastic about the flexibility that we gained during the negotiation of the directive, MAFF is finding that the interpretation of flexibility is fraught with difficulty and results in unfair, discriminatory and arbitrary practices in respect of some farmers, which the Ministry finds it extremely difficult to justify.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

I remind the House that once a directive has been agreed to by unanimity it can be changed only by unanimity. That puts us in an extremely invidious position. I regret dragging my hon. Friend the Minister to the Dispatch Box on these issues, for which he was not responsible. He is not responsible either for the way in which policy is being implemented. I hope that he has heard my concerns sympathetically and that he will take them to the heart of government. If we are to avoid the over-regulation of business and farming and loss of jobs, we must tackle the problems that stem from the heart of Europe.

12.10 am

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I am grateful to have the chance to contribute briefly to the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) has said, some of my constituents are affected by the Nayland nitrate-vulnerable zone. I endorse everything that he said about the specifics of the zone.

My hon. Friend was right to draw attention to the lack of any proper scientific basis for the directive. It is seriously flawed in that respect. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give us an unequivocal assurance that his officials are pursuing with the Commission the urgent need to revise the directive. In view of what my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North said about unanimity, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that he is contacting all the other 14 members of the Council to get their support for urgent and overdue reform.

I hope also that my hon. Friend the Minister will talk to his colleagues in MAFF to get them to agree to defer any action to implement the directive at Nayland and many other parts of the country. I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend's assurances.

12.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I wondered whether I was to hear a dissertation on hobby-horse riding. It seems, however, that markers have been set for consultation. We are in the first stage of that consultation.

I think that we can all accept that maintaining and improving the quality of water by setting quality standards is an essential element of the sustainable management of our water resources. Such an approach is essential for safeguarding our drinking water supply and for protecting aquatic life. It is also important that standards should be respected. Elevated levels of nitrate can lead to problems. That is mainly where the water is used as drinking water, or if putrefaction occurs.

When there is a risk that water for potable water supply exceeds the nitrate ceiling set in the drinking water directive, there are three options. First, the water could be cleaned up. That means that the water companies would remove the nitrates at their customers' expense before the water was used for public supply. That is being done by several water companies, in instances of nitrate-polluted sources. Secondiy, the nitrate could be reduced at source. That is where our measure to reduce nitrate pollution from agriculture comes in. Nitrate-vulnerable zones are one strand of a package of measures to reduce nitrate pollution from agriculture. The third option is a combination of the first and second. That reflects the current situation in the United Kingdom.

We broadly welcome the Commission's proposal in the directive to reduce nitrate pollution from agriculture. The directive was published in 1989, which was slightly before my time. It was in line with the Government's policies on protecting the quality of our water resources. However, several aspects of the proposal caused concern. During negotiations, many of those aspects were addressed and amended. The final text incorporated many of the amendments, as we would have wished.

The Government signed up to the nitrates directive when we were content that it represented what we wanted in terms of providing a balance between maintaining a viable and efficient agriculture and protecting and improving our environment. Within its overall objective and deadlines, the directive offers discretion on how to achieve the requirements, and we have taken advantage of that where appropriate.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Hatton groundwater scheme is the basis on which the prototype Government decision was taken? Yet the Staffordshire farmers examined the matter extremely carefully and came to the conclusion that, having regard to the realities of what the Hatton scheme has demonstrated over the past 90 to 100 years, the European directive was completely out of order.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) said, that question has been considered over a period without any satisfactory result, so I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to answer it directly now. But will he be good enough to take the matter back for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to reconsider?

Sir Paul Beresford: I should certainly be happy to take that question forward and to ask for a response from MAFF. But as my hon. Friend understands, as it is predominantly a MAFF question, I could not be expected to be able to answer it this evening.

Our approach has resulted in proposed vulnerable zones covering 650,000 hectares, compared with the 2 million hectares initially estimated in the negotiations. For example, there are far fewer surface water vulnerable zones than was originally expected.

My hon. Friends will know that we have set up a consultation process to seek the views of those likely to be affected by the proposed vulnerable zones. It is worth regarding tonight's debate as part of that package. The intention is to confirm the accuracy of zone boundaries before their formal designation, using farmers' local knowledge.

The Government's response to the consultation document published last year will address the main issues raised by farmers and other consultees. We shall do that either in our response document, which we expect to issue soon, or in the individual responses being sent out to all the letters received.

Mr. Jenkin: Is my hon. Friend saying that he believes that the basis of the directive is still sound, or is he simply saying that we have to carry on implementing it because

we are stuck with it, as it was agreed by unanimity and that is that, because of the way in which the European Community works?

Sir Paul Beresford: Neither, in effect. I am saying that there are elements involving good agricultural techniques which in a few areas—considerably fewer than originally expected—may have to be statutory.

A key part of the Government's response will be our decisions on the boundaries and locations of the proposed zones—I emphasise the word "proposed"—and those will be made known in the form of amended maps of the NVZs.

Mr. Jenkin: Where there is clearly no logical provable explanation involving connections between the levels of nitrates in the river and agricultural activity, as in Nayland—the implementation of the Nayland nitrate-vulnerable zone will result in no change whatever in agricultural practice—will my hon. Friend ask for those nitrate-vulnerable zones to be reviewed and dropped? If not, the directive is proving a complete farce.

Sir Paul Beresford: I think that I was making it clear that we are in the process of consultation, that there will be amendments, shifts and changes, and that nothing is set in tablets of stone.

Farmers who are dissatisfied with the Government's decisions on the boundaries and locations of the proposed NVZs as set out in the response document, in individual responses or in the amended maps will have the opportunity to present their case in writing to the independent review panel to be jointly commissioned by the Department of the Environment, MAFF and Welsh Office Ministers. The independent review procedure will ensure that our vulnerable zone proposals will have been objectively assessed prior to designation.

Following our initial consultation, we shall undertake another public consultation on the measures that might be introduced in the zones before their formal establishment. The resulting reductions in nitrate leaching in vulnerable zones will add to the reductions already taking place because of recent changes in agriculture and voluntary applications of the code of good agricultural practice for the protection of water issued by MAFF and the Welsh Office Agriculture Department.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 15 March 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Wilderness Areas (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate this subject, not least because it allowed me to spend last weekend hill walking in the Scottish highlands and to justify that as research. The Under-Secretary may like to know that I visited An Teallach—a magnificent mountain just above Loch Broom on Wester Ross. I reflected, as everyone who walks the Scottish hills must do, that we are custodians of a truly spectacular landscape that is unique in the world.

There is a growing consensus that particular areas of the Scottish hills are under great pressure from tourism, recreational use and all the other factors that arise from a mass leisure society, and that such areas merit special protection backed by Government regulation and administration. That is especially true of areas around Loch Lomond and the Cairngorms, where there is an overwhelming case for national parks.

We must be careful that regulations and controls designed to protect areas do not smother or stifle the people who live and work in those communities. The last thing that we want is another undemocratic quango. Democratic accountability and input from local communities are essential. However, the need for special protection and regulation is undeniable. I shall leave it to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) to pursue that aspect in detail, because he has a constituency interest. My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), who also has great expertise in the subject, feels strongly that there is a need for national parks, and I know that he would have liked to be present this morning to hear this important debate.

Last year, the World Conservation Union published a report, "Paths for Life: Action for Protected Areas in Europe", which was welcomed by the Secretary of State for the Environment and strongly supported by Scottish Natural Heritage. However, there has been a conspicuous silence from the Scottish Office so far, and it is suggested that the Department is less than enthusiastic about the report. I shall be glad if the Minister will give the report a warm welcome and describe the steps being taken by the Scottish Office to implement the report's recommendations.

The rest of the highlands, beyond the high-pressure hot spots of the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond, and the wilderness areas receive fewer visitors and are therefore less controversial, but they are every bit as special. Their vulnerability arises not from the rise of mass leisure but from centuries of neglect and abuse. We think of the highlands as a wilderness, but as Francis Fraser Darling wrote in his classic account of highlands and islands ecology, it is a man-made wilderness and a unnecessary desert, and it could be restored and regenerated with the right land use and management. Jim Hunter, the historian of the highlands crofting community, pointed out that to describe the highlands and island as a wilderness or unspoilt, as people frequently do, is to abuse both the language and history.

Jim Hunter has cited the words of the Canadian novelist Hugh MacLennan, who is a great grandson of a 19th-century immigrant from the Scottish highlands, and who, in an essay called "Scotchman's Return", recorded some impressions of the highlands from which his ancestors had been expelled just a century before. In MacLennan's view, in some ways the landscapes of highland Scotland resembled those of the Canadian Arctic, but he found one fundamental difference.

In his essay, MacLennan wrote:

"This Highland emptiness only a few hundred miles above the massed population of England is a far different thing from the emptiness of our own North-West Territories. Above the 60th parallel in Canada, you feel that nobody but God has ever been there before you. But in a deserted Highland Glen, you feel that everyone who ever mattered is dead and gone."

A similar point was made more recently by the chairman of the north west region of Scottish Natural Heritage, Sir John Lister-Kaye, in a pamphlet which he published last year called "Ill Fares the Land". He points to the great damage caused by sporting estates over the past century, and their role in the general process of environmental degradation of the highlands. Sir John wrote that the sporting estates were a purely extractive form of land use, extracting nutrients from an already impoverished landscape, and returning nothing to it.

It is often claimed by patrons of sporting estates that the estates provide some kind of economic boost to the highlands, but that is yet another myth. Deer stalking estates cover almost 20 per cent. of the total land area of Scotland, but red deer management was estimated by Scottish Natural Heritage in 1991 to provide only 316 full-time and 458 part-time jobs in the whole of Scotland, with 173 downstream jobs. The total income from commercial shooting and from subsequent venison sales was about £8 million.

That has to be set against the annual income from recreational activities such as hiking and hill walking, which the Scottish tourist board estimates brings about £270 million a year to Scotland. That estimate was made in 1989, and the figure today is probably nearer £300 million.

Such misuse and abuse of land in the highlands has reduced much of it to what is now perceived as wilderness—an empty, depopulated and degraded landscape, which also suffers from environmental and social and economic degradation.

It does not have to be like that. The scenic and ecological integrity of the highlands can be protected and enhanced, while promoting healthy and economically active rural communities. The two go best together: wilderness does not have to mean emptiness. To the extent that the highlands are devoid of people, it is not to the benefit of nature or the environment but rather to their active detriment, because it leads directly to neglect and abuse.

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

I should like to make a comparison between Scotland and Norway. It is an apt comparison, and will be recognised as such by the Minister, because it was used by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), at the time of the setting up of Scottish Natural Heritage three or four years ago. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that Scotland's ecology was more like that of Scandinavia than that of southern Britain.

Two years ago, Scottish Natural Heritage supported a study visit to the Hardaland region of western Norway. It took a representative group involved in land use community issues in rural Scotland, and a report of the visit was published last year in a pamphlet called "Scotland and Norway: a Study in Land Use". In ecological and climatic terms, the Hardaland region has much in common not just with Scotland in general but with the highlands in particular, including incessant rainfall. Like the highlands, Hardaland was extensively deforested centuries ago, but, unlike Scotland, the natural forest has been allowed to regenerate over the past 150 to 200 years.

The biggest difference is that, although the Hardaland region is slightly smaller than the highlands, it carries almost twice the population—414,000, compared with just over 200,000. About half the Hardaland population is in the city of Bergen, but even beyond that, in the rural areas the population is significantly greater in Hardaland than in the highlands. The reason for that difference lies in the system of land use and forestry that is employed in Hardaland.

In Scotland, forests are owned by large private estates or large state enterprises such as the Forestry Commission. In Norway, the tradition is to combine a small family farm with a small family forest. Typically, the family farm in Hardaland consists of about 10 hectares of land and about 60 hectares of forest per family.

Land use and land ownership in Norway is small-scale and decentralised. Forestry and agriculture are integrated at all levels of the system, and Government intervention and support are geared to encourage a range of farming and family-linked activities. That is in contrast to the highlands, where all support is focused on intensive sheep farming or blanket forestry.

The Minister will remember that I wrote to him a few weeks ago asking why support could not be provided to people who wish to raise goats for cashmere wool in the highlands, instead of all support being directed towards sheep or forestry. The Minister said that that was not possible, but it is exactly the kind of multi-purpose farming that is carried on in Norway, and we should encourage it more in the Scottish highlands.

The result of such diversified farming is healthy and stable rural communities in Norway, and a landscape that is obviously cared for and looked after. That is obvious to any visitor, and the land provides employment and income for local people. The contrast between that kind of community and landscape and the so-called wilderness areas of Scotland could not be more stark.

The fundamental difference between Scotland and Norway is one that I have not yet mentioned—land ownership. Land use and land management ultimately depend upon the control and ownership of the land. In Norway, the people own the land upon which they live and work. As the Minister well knows, in the highlands the land and its products are in the hands of a tiny few.

It is depressing, but far from surprising, to read that the titles of the top landowners of 1995 are those of the top landowners of 1875. They are the Duke of Atholl, the Countess of Sutherland, Cameron of Locheil and lesser grandees all the way down the social scale. Of course, there has been some turnover of ownership, but even where land has changed hands, the community has had no say, influence or input whatever.

Land ownership in the highlands is a speculative market for private investors, who buy up the highlands for the same reason that they buy up jewellery or oil paintings—to get a tax advantage. It is somewhere to store surplus cash. The sale and transfer of estates bears no relation to the environmental needs of the land or the interests of local people. It is a lottery, with a responsible landowner perhaps emerging now and again, but more frequently estates pass into the hands of people who have no genuine or long-term interest in the highlands.

I want to give one or two examples of the resulting fruits of land speculation. The Knoydart estate has 16,500 acres. It is one of the jewels in the highlands crown. It was sold for £1.7 million to a company called Titaghur plc, a jute manufacturing company with half a dozen mills and 17,000 employees in India. It also has a reported debt of £67 million, and the company is apparently going bust. I hear that the Indian authorities have served an extradition order on its chairman. What on earth are we doing allowing an estate like Knoydart to pass into the hands of such a company?

Strathconnan estate has 60,000 acres. It was sold recently for between £1 million and £3 million to the Danish owners of the Lego toy company. It is notable that Lego's owners would not have been able to make such a purchase in Denmark, because the Danish Agricultural Act 1973 excludes the purchase of land for recreation or hobby farming. It also prohibits wide disparities between the selling price of land and its productive value. It is not simply that Scots would not be able to make such a purchase in Denmark; even the Danes cannot speculate in that way—but they are allowed to come to the highlands and do it there.

The openness of the land lottery is well illustrated by an article in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* 29 June last year. It quoted a company called Bowlts, in Elgin, which was trying to sell the Strathvaich estate. The article said:

"A great deal of interest has come, not only from Britain but also . . . America, Canada, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, France, Italy and the Far East"—

interest from everywhere, it seems, but the local community. How could there be local interest, with an asking price of £2.5 million?

The issue matters deeply, because a feudal pattern of land ownership is not a harmless relic from another age; it profoundly distorts the social and economic life of the highlands, and it contributes directly to the environmental degradation and the economic and social decline associated with that.

That was recognised by the Highlands and Islands development board in a consultation document in June 1978, in which it called for greater powers for the board over land use and ownership. It stated on page 7:

"Detailed case studies . . . have illustrated the effects of losses of production, tenancies and employment in fragile areas on the structure and viability of local communities. In some cases, whole communities have been put at risk. These studies illustrate the clash which can, and does occur between the interests of owner and community in the Highlands and Islands, and emphasises the measure of power, for good or ill, that can be wrought by one private individual over the lives of whole communities . . . under present legislation, the only necessary qualification for wielding this power is sufficient means to purchase the land."

That must end. The management of Scotland's wilderness areas and the prosperity and future of highlands communities cannot be left to the whims of the speculator and the dilettante. Nor can they be held for ever in the hands of an unelected few, who owe their positions of power to nothing but the accident of birth.

I want to suggest four ways in which we can begin to change the position. First, we need to know who owns the land, how much, and where. We need a comprehensive land registry, open and available to the public, of a kind not available in Britain since the late 19th century—150 years is too long a wait for such basic and essential information. It is time the Government acted and made it available to the public.

The second change must be in the taxation of land. Scotland's landed classes thought that they had pulled a neat trick last year, when, in the other place, an amendment was moved to the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill, abolishing sporting rates on large land estates. That is worth about £2 million to the wealthiest land owners in Scotland. On 22 January, an article on the property page of *The Mail on Sunday* reported that the exemption was

"the big bang that Scotland's hunting, shooting and fishing fraternity has been waiting for. From April, the tax paid on land used for field sports will disappear, as announced in the last Budget. As a result, the value of sporting land is set to rise".

I believe that that move will blow up in the faces of Scotland's landowners. It has placed the question of land taxation firmly back on the political agenda. If sporting rates had been left undisturbed, perhaps no one would have questioned them more deeply. Now that they have been abolished, there is the unacceptable position of large land estates paying no local taxes.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's blanket condemnation of all landlords in Scotland, which is quite unreasonable in view of the high standard of management on many estates, especially with regard to sporting rates. Is he saying that he would rather continue the policy under which Scotland pays substantially more sporting rates than England? Does he believe that that unfair practice should continue?

Mr. Macdonald: The Minister cannot possibly compare the large sporting estates of Scotland with estates in England. The difference is obvious. Indeed, it was apparent to the Victorian legislators who originally decided to impose sporting rates. I also do not see how the Minister can justify the anomaly of exempting sporting estates from paying local rates when even a Holiday hotel has to pay local rates, as do other businesses.

The exemption for agricultural purposes is accepted, and nobody challenges that. However, there is no justification for exempting recreational and holiday estates from local taxation. That point was made to the Scottish Office last year in a joint letter to the Secretary of State from the chairmen of Scotland's rating valuation tribunals, which are independent.

In a letter that was leaked to the *Glasgow Herald*, they condemned the exemption as indefensible, and said:

"It is clearly totally wrong that a large estate . . . valued well into the seven figure bracket, should pay no local taxes".

That is especially true when they use local services such as roads, the snow clearing service and the police service. That is especially relevant to the salmon estates, which make great use of the police service. Does the Minister think that those chairmen are wrong?

No Government who are not in the grip of Tory landlords could possibly defend that anomaly. Large landed estates will have to be brought back into the taxation system. The move to exempt sporting rates has vilified the whole issue of the taxation of large land estates. We should now use the opportunity created by that to conduct a comprehensive review of the fiscal position of large land estates throughout Scotland, not just in the highlands. We should consider taxing land values as a means of taxing land speculation out of existence.

Taxation can help to deflate the speculative lottery of estate sales, but we need to do more than that. We require a set of public interest criteria that a prospective purchaser would have to fulfil before being permitted to take over ownership of any large estate.

That is not an entirely new idea. In the same report that I cited earlier, the HIDB called for changes to the Highlands and Islands Development (Scotland) Act 1965 to bring about more effective powers over rural land use. In that report, published in June 1978, it called for special powers in designated areas in the Highlands to veto any prospective land sale that did not conform to the HIDB's development plan for that region. Its proposals are contained in detail in section 68 of its report, a section called "Mechanism of Control Over the Sale of Land." It points out that its proposals have parallels in legislation in at least six European countries, notably Denmark and Norway.

We should bring out those HIDB proposals and examine them once again. I would make three changes to that 1978 plan. The first involves the fact that the HIDB, or Highlands and Islands Enterprise as it is now, is probably not the appropriate body to undertake such a scheme for the 1990s. A specialised land commission or a land use council would be more appropriate. It is worth remembering that a land use council was proposed in the 1970s by the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs in its report "Land Resource Use in Rural Scotland". Today, the need for a land use council is even greater.

Secondly, the scheme should apply not just to small designated areas, as the HIDB suggested, but to the whole of the highlands. Thirdly, from the point of view of the public interest, the development criteria against which large land sales should be evaluated should contain not just the social and economic goals that the HIDB were concentrating on in the 1970s, but the environmental goals that we now accept as being profoundly important.

The HIDB proposal, or my changes to it, would involve no compulsory purchasing, no nationalisation, no state ownership and no cost to the public purse, but it would

[Mr. Macdonald]

leave a competitive, tightly regulated market in the sale of land. It would soon begin to have a dramatic effect on that market by weeding out the most unsuitable speculators and purchasers of estates—the Kluges and the Schellenbergs. It would contribute gradually to the deflating of the speculative value of Scottish estates. Only people with a genuine environmental, social and economic interest in developing the highlands would commit themselves to buying. That should have a significant effect on lowering prices.

That in turn should make a purchase easier for public interest groups such as the John Muir trust, which has been active in recent years, and it should bring estates more within the reach of local communities. That final aspect is the most important. We need to introduce measures that will begin to return the land to the people and to local communities so that they can manage the land directly.

Three local, democratically elected and accountable land trusts exist in the highlands. The Stornoway trust in my constituency has been going since the 1920s, and the Assynt trust in Lochinver was formed amid great publicity and great public approval last year. There is also the Borve trust in Skye. Those trusts will act as an inspiration and as a model that other communities will wish to follow.

The Government should actively intervene in the land market when local communities express the desire for more democratic control and direct ownership of their land. The initiative must come from local people, but, when it does, the Government should help in all ways possible, including financial. In that way, step by step and estate by estate, such community initiatives could begin to change the face of the highlands.

That would, of course, cost money, but resources are available that could be used even now. I wish to cite just a couple. In January, for example, the Duke of Atholl, whose lands are estimated to be valued at about £140 million, claimed £400,000 from the Forestry Commission for planting tress in Glen Bruar. Lord Strathnaver is claiming £150,000 from Scottish Natural Heritage, not for planting trees, but for not cutting them in Loch Shell in Sutherland.

Those are two of the biggest landowners in Britain—the fifth and sixth biggest respectively. They are engaged in a racket at the expense of the taxpayer. Lord Strathnaver wishes to be paid not to chop down trees and not to commit an act of environmental vandalism. If millions of pounds can be handed out to large landowners for doing literally nothing, the ordinary people of the highlands have a right to Government support and financial assistance when they aspire to take over their land.

That is one source of funding. Other resources could be used to finance the success of community ownership. Last financial year, for example, the sums allocated to promoting environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland were underspent by 86 per cent.—some £4 million. The previous year, underspend totalled around £3 million.

What is the explanation for those massive underspends in environmentally sensitive area budgets, and why can they not be diverted into helping communities such as Assynt to reclaim and restore land? Why can those funds not be used to help communities that wish to purchase small estates that are up for disposal from the Forestry Commission? Local communities wish to take over those small plantations, so why cannot the Government step in and help them realise their ambitions?

Those various alternative sources of funding are available to the Scottish Office, but a public fund is already in existence and it is even more ideally suited to that purpose. The National Heritage Memorial Fund started life as the National Land Fund. It was established by Hugh Dalton in 1949 to purchase, in his words,

"the loveliest parts of this land",

as a dedication to the memory of the war dead and for

"the use and enjoyment of the living for ever".

Unfortunately, after 32 years of Conservative Government since 1949, and two name changes to the fund, it has become better known for purchasing stately homes, sculptures and oil paintings than for buying land for the people—its original purpose. The next Labour Government can and must change that. If the fund can spend £1.5 million on a single painting for the National Gallery, as it did last year, it can afford to spend many millions of pounds more on its original mission of buying the land back for the public.

I have made four suggestions not just for the management, but for the restoration and regeneration, of Scotland's so-called wilderness areas. Those measures, or measures like them, would bring about a revolution in land management and land ownership in the highlands. They should be a major priority of the next Labour Government and of our new Scottish Parliament, so that local communities in Scotland can at last retrieve that power over their lives, which is the essential foundation of the economic revival and environmental regeneration of the highlands.

10.38 am

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The House is greatly indebted to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) for introducing this debate. The highlands cover almost half of Scotland's land mass, and much of the land covered falls into the category of wilderness, about which the hon. Gentleman spoke. Like the hon. Gentleman, I too have long been interested in the use of that land for enjoyment and economic activity that retains the environmental attractiveness and scenic interest for visitors.

I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman refer to the 1978 Highlands and Islands development board proposals, which, alas, dropped out of sight as soon as the present Government took office. Those proposals followed rather closely recommendations that I made in a private Member's Bill back in 1973, which were debated in the Scottish Grand Committee.

The essence of the proposals seems not to have dated entirely and, like the hon. Gentleman, I very much hope that they will be reviewed and reconsidered at least as a starting point for discussions about how to deal with the conflicts, in the highlands in particular, over the use of land and the conflicts of interest between those who effectively regard the devastated areas of wilderness as places that should not be touched, and those with other views.

The hon. Gentleman was right to refer to Fraser Darling, the father of the study of the problem, and his famous west highland survey, and to remind us that the

present degradation of much of that land is due to human intervention and neglect and, at various times in history, to a single concept being brought to bear on the use of the land, to the exclusion of other interests.

Sadly, it is not the case, as the Minister perhaps implied in his intervention, that all is well in the highlands. He made a rather sweeping attack, which I thought misrepresented the hon. Member for Western Isles, who was not attacking landlords in general. The hon. Gentleman criticised some landlords for some activities, although I do not entirely agree with him about at least one case—that of Lord Strathnaver—which affects my constituency.

In that case, the principle is not unlike that of the set-aside arrangements: if one is not going to harvest a crop and derive an income from one's plantations of trees, it is reasonable to be compensated. However, it is a detail, about which we could have a useful discussion.

It is clear that there are still significant conflicts. I am sorry to say that there is even an eviction case in my constituency which recalls past events. It involves James Moffat and Forest Farms near Croick in Strath Carron. It is a most distressing case. Scottish Natural Heritage was involved from the beginning, although it was not responsible for the threatened eviction of Mr. Moffat, who is the last remaining sheep rearer in a valley that produced great flocks of sheep which were known at the sales—especially the Lairg sales in Sutherland—as the best in the county.

That Mr. Moffat and his family should be left without a home, and the fact that the eviction means the disappearance of his sheep enterprise from the valley, is a reflection on the inadequacy of the existing arrangements for multi-purpose land use. As I said, SNH was involved at an early stage in order to try to encourage the development of native broadleaved species there and supported the new proprietors in their enterprise, but the way in which the matter has been handled is wholly unsatisfactory.

The Minister will be aware of another case in my constituency—that of Mr. Alec Sinclair of Stirkoke in Caithness, who owns the farm of Munsary, which is a large area close to Dubh lochs of Shielton. The Dubh lochs were properly designated as sites of special scientific interest by SNH. The matter was originally handled very well, with suitable management agreements being entered into with the proprietors.

However, when Mr. Sinclair wanted to sell his farm, which was certainly not in the same category of sensitivity or importance as the Dubh lochs of Shielton, the SNH moved in and proceeded, without adequate inspection, to have it declared an SSSI. It has thereby destroyed the prospect of afforestation in the area and the prospect of Mr. Sinclair using the resources drawn from the sale to develop appropriately his low-ground farming activity.

That case is a very sharp illustration of how unsatisfactory the present arrangements are for considering multi-purpose land use. It should not be possible for an agency, which is ultimately able to dispose of such matters without appeal to the Secretary of State, to be able to intervene and destroy a venture of the kind on which Mr. Sinclair was embarked. Parliament will have to return to the question whether it is satisfactory not to have a democratic appeals system against intervention by such an environmental agency. I do not believe it is, but the picture is perhaps more kaleidoscopic than when I first discussed these matters in the early and mid-1970s.

As the hon. Member for Western Isles said, it is true that land use has remained in the hands of some of the great landowners, but new elements are appearing—such as the arrival of great foreign investors such as the owners of Lego from Denmark. A further new development is the acquisition of land by bodies whose sole purpose is environmental protection. I am thinking of, for example, the John Muir trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, both of whom have acquired substantial estates in Sutherland in the past two years. The John Muir trust has an estate at Kinlochbervie, and the RSPB has an estate at Forsinard.

Although I have some admiration for the way in which the RSPB has set about its task, I am concerned to ensure that the acquisition of estates by organisations with a single use in mind does not mean the exclusion of economic activity, and that, in their understandable enthusiasm to protect what they own, such organisations do not seek to exclude visitors, hikers or those who are of great value to the communities in those areas.

Nor would I wish that type of organisation to have priority over developments which are locally owned and locally based. The Assynt trust development is, in its way, a model. Indeed, the extent to which public bodies were prepared to be involved in the Assynt trust was particularly encouraging. It was financially backed by the local enterprise company and the Highland regional council in the first instance, and it is possible that we shall see the kind of multi-purpose use evident in Norway, to which the hon. Member for Western Isles drew attention, which seems to be very much a model. I am particularly interested in the thinking of Assynt on the use of small plantations greatly to enhance the environment.

I do not wish to take up the time of the debate, because many hon. Members want to speak. I am most grateful for the opportunity to support the hon. Member for Western Isles in his call for the study of four specific measures. The land register, the taxation of under-used land, the set of public interest criteria against which to judge activities and the bringing of land under local management and control are all worthy of debate. His initiative should be strongly backed.

10.50 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I shall be extremely brief. I add my congratulations to those which have already been given to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. MacDonald) for bringing this very important issue before the House. Although this is a fairly lengthy debate today, the subject merits additional attention, and should certainly be taken forward by the Government and Opposition parties.

It is worth while reminding the House that, when we talk about land, especially in the highlands and islands of Scotland, we do so with a great deal of passion. Seared into our psyche is the memory of the highland clearances:

> "The people damned by the black-faced ram,
> And the factor's fire-raisers"—

as the folk song goes. That memory always colours our attitudes to such matters.

It is important that we stress to the Government that we are looking not for a patronising attitude toward the highlands and islands, but for positive action, so that our people may remain in their glens, by their lochsides, and earn a decent living in a modern context. We have moved

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

well past the stage of thinking of the highlands and islands as having a productivity of half an ounce of grouse per acre. We now recognise that the people of the area can bring important factors into play through tourism, their skills and their knowledge, and, particularly with the development of information technology, by work which makes it possible for them to stay in those remote areas.

I emphasise the importance attached by the hon. Member for Western Isles to the ownership and management of land. All of us want to see a correct balance. I certainly endorse the view that we should not ever have the attitude that all Scottish landowners are good and everybody else is bad, because the reality is that there is a mixture of good and bad landowners from all different origins in the highlands and islands. We want a people-centred policy: centred on the people whose linguistic and natural skills should enable them to make a living in their own area. We are looking for a sensible balance.

I remind the Minister that the Public Accounts Committee substantially criticised the failure to develop a land registry in Scotland. A report in November showed that no registration had taken place north of the Tay. It is high time that a register operated in the highlands and islands. I welcome the fact that my party has set up an independent land commission to which everyone is invited to give evidence, so that we may try to process information a little faster than Government tactics have made possible.

10.53 am

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I shall also be brief, because time is running out. The highlands are also dear to me, as a representative of the central belt of Scotland and as a Scotsman. In fact, they are dear to every person in Scotland. I was a councillor for 16 years, and I ended up as the chairman of the Lothian planning committee. We set up the reforestation of the central belt in the moorlands between Strathclyde and Lothian. I believe that the scheme is going very well. The trees were scientifically planted and looked after, because the lands needed that investment.

As a keen angler, and also, I must admit, as a member of a quango—non-paid, by the way—because of my role as an adviser to the forestry commission of the south and west of Scotland, my eyes were opened to what was going on and what could be done under good management. I had to compliment the commission: I had no criticism of it at all. It gives access and opens up places to the public in and around Galloway, Dumfries and the Borders region.

My aim is to achieve a joint effort. The panic button is set off when I see privatisation. Privatisation means "Private: Keep Out". One of my ambitions—it should be an ambition of all Scotsmen—is to get to know Scotland. How can people get to know Scotland when there is a "Keep Out" notice? How can we get to know the land of our birth when people are standing there, defying us, pushing us away and building obstacles, so that we cannot even stop our cars at the side of the road?

Those notices and obstacles are all part and parcel of the supposedly well-run estates. I have paid to fish in some parts of Scotland. I am sure that the hon. Member for Caithness Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) would agree that the flow lands have a beauty of their own. Again, the panic button was pressed when people were talking about using the lands for a dump for toxic or nuclear waste. The whole of Scotland stood up and said, "No, you can't do that." It was once a proposal, and I hope that it will never become a reality.

I join my colleagues from Scotland in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) for raising the subject. I emphasise how sensitive it is. I am sure that, as a Scotsman from the part of the world that I was praising earlier, the Minister is well aware of the sensitivity of and need for this debate.

It is all very well to say that there are well-managed estates. So there are, but others are the private domain of a group of people who are intent on using their land for one purpose only, and the community around it can get lost as far as they are concerned. There has to be public input, and for large tracts of Scotland there must be joint responsibility among the local authorities—the elected representatives—and obviously the Government, as well as private owners, landlords and others.

As a representative of the semi-rural area of Midlothian, I appreciate the country. As a miner, I used to use the countryside as a lung. Scotland should be used as a lung for people in industrial areas, and they should have access to land where they can enjoy its beauty and the fresh air. I hope that the debate has succeeded in emphasising certain points which have been made by my colleagues, and that the Minister will reply positively.

10.58 am

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. MacDonald)? He has done us a great favour in introducing this debate. I shall talk exclusively about a wilderness area in my constituency: Loch Lomond.

I had to telephone the Minister's office to get a copy of the Government's response to the Hutchison report on Loch Lomond, despite the fact that the Minister and Mr. Magnus Magnusson publicly launched it on Monday, and that every Scottish journalist with an interest had that document. Will the Minister have some respect for the Opposition, and at least give us information at the same time as journalists receive it? Also, I hope that Sir Russell Hillhouse, the permanent secretary to the Scottish Office, will ensure that the civil servants act impartially, so that we obtain documents at the same time as journalists.

It has taken a long time for a response to the document to appear. Ten years ago, the Government set up the Countryside Commission to consider Loch Lomond and the national parks. The Countryside Commission reported in July 1990, and the Government refused to accept its recommendations. The response to the document on Monday is illustrated in the comments in *The Herald*, which referred to a

"Trumpet of disbelief for Loch Lomond's voluntary solution."

I have been very concerned about Loch Lomond for many years. On at least three occasions over the past six or seven years, I have convened meetings in my constituency which, on each occasion, were attended by at least 150 people from all parts of the political spectrum—by those from the town and the countryside, and by environmentalists, recreationists and anglers. On every occasion, a firm and universal view about the problems of Loch Lomond was expressed. The only person who is out of step is the Secretary of State.

I can inform the Secretary of State and the Minister that the community body, the Friends of Loch Lomond, met last night. They described the document to which I have referred as "procrastination". The Minister has friends among the Friends of Loch Lomond—witness the fact that three members of the executive council of that body were appointed by the Secretary of State to the Hutchison committee. They are deeply dismayed by the response in the document.

Sir Peter Hutchison, whom the Secretary of State appointed personally, said on Monday that the Secretary of State must not lose ownership of the problem, because it is not a local problem; it is not within the fiefdom of the local authorities. It is a national problem, and the Secretary of State has abdicated his responsibility to Loch Lomond and to the national dimension.

The Secretary of State is cheating on the timetable. He set up the Countryside Commission 10 years ago to examine the issue. It reported, and he immediately shelved its report. He set up the Hutchison committee a few years ago. It reported two years ago, and he delayed a response until last Monday. The Secretary of State has passed the Hutchison committee report on to the local authorities, but he has given them no succour or indication of what finance will be available. That is a complete and utter abdication of his responsibilities.

I remind the Minister that the Countryside Commission report stated that Loch Lomond should have national park status, because, among other aspects, it would then join 130 other countries which have national parks in having indicative land strategies for land management, for key land uses, for the establishment of land management forums, for the integration of grants for conservation and agriculture, and for protection for wilderness land, better land management and access to open country.

It is crystal clear that we are totally out of step with our neighbours in Europe. Not only are we out of step: we will not have an opportunity to have grants and financial assistance that are available to other countries.

The essence of the document published on Monday is that the Secretary of State has set up a joint committee, as witnessed in paragraph 12 on page 7, to consider a joint committee. According to paragraph 12, the joint committee of Loch Lomond park authority, which exists at the moment, will be superseded by another joint committee, which will then consider the feasibility of having the Loch Lomond park authority and the Trossachs as part of yet another joint committee.

Leaving aside the question of the creation of a joint committee to consider a joint committee, why in the interim, cannot the Minister consider the whole area? If the Secretary of State so decides, he could exclude the Trossachs now, and could fund the existing joint committee—the Loch Lomond park authority—to the minimum of 75 per cent. which the Hutchison committee report recommended. He could also provide additional borrowing for capital consents to the constituent local authorities. However, he is not doing that, because, contrary to utchison's recommendations, the document contains no hint of what the funding will be.

The Secretary of State could appeal to the local authorities today—I would join in that appeal from the House of Commons—to give over their powers to the joint committee, as recommended by Hutchison, so that the finance, consent and lead from central Government would be given. The Secretary of State would have the full support of the official Opposition in that. While the interim committee looks to the future and considers whether the Loch Lomond and Trossachs areas should be separate or combined, at least we would be starting presently to consider the issue of a management programme for Loch Lomond.

Either the community and I are hopeless in advocating the case, or the Secretary of State is impervious to logical argument. I believe that the community would resoundingly state that it is the latter. The Secretary of State has ignored the point time and time again. As I have said, this is not a local issue: it is a national issue.

I cannot stress too strongly the urgency of the matter. There were a number of distinguished speakers at the meeting I held at Loch Lomond a couple of years ago. One was Mr. John Arnott, who used to be the vice-chairman of the Countryside Commission in Scotland. He advocated the case for national park status for Loch Lomond. About structure, and taking a comprehensive view of all the land and other uses, he said:

> "Elsewhere in Britain this was not so in the creation of the national parks . . . which had two purposes: preserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the areas, and promoting their enjoyment by the public. It was not so in the creation of the Regional Park . . . in Loch Lomond"—

because the present structure under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981 simply stated that the park was being set up as

> "An extensive area of land, part of which is devoted to the recreational needs of the public."

If the Secretary of State was serious about taking the Hutchison committee report at face value, he would have dwelt on page 14 of the report, where the management philosophy was elaborated. It stated that of crucial importance is environmental sustainability. It contains sections on

> "maintaining ecological health and integrity . . . fostering social and economic wellbeing . . . maintaining fundamentally the rural character",

as that would provide

> "environmentally responsible enjoyment of the countryside."

The Hutchison report's philosphy was eminently sensible, but there is not one iota of sense in the document published on Monday, to which I am referring. The community will agree with me about that. *The Herald*, *The Scotsman* and others have, over the past few years, advocated a campaign to stop Loch Lomond turning into an environmental disaster area. Every day the Secretary of State delays, the more chance there is that it will be turned into an environmental disaster area.

At the moment, Loch Lomond is simply an unregulated pond. Anyone can travel up the M6 with a boat, launch it on the loch at any point, and travel at any speed on the loch. The Secretary of State will be aware of the death on the loch last year of a young girl—Ann McAulay—because no regulations were in force. As we speak today, no regulations have been put in place, simply because of the Government's lack of interest in Loch Lomond.

What sort of interest is shown in Loch Lomond? The Secretary of State has moved in the past few months. He gave planning permission for a development on the shores of Loch Lomond to Dr. Michael Kelly and his friends. They established a plan, which they put to the district

[Mr. John McFall]

council several years ago. Notwithstanding the district council's unanimous rejection of the plan, the Secretary of State decided to go ahead, and give Dr. Kelly permission.

Dr. Kelly and his colleagues are the equivalent of the Loch Lomond derivative merchants. In this case, they are not playing around with other people's money. It is much more serious, because they are playing around with the natural landscape, the environment and the conservation jewel of Loch Lomond.

From day one, when they put their proposals to Dumbarton district council, Dr. Kelly and his colleagues did not mention a business plan. Indeed, they refused to put one forward. They still refuse to put one forward to the Secretary of State. However, in the Secretary of State's idleness—that is the only way I can describe it, as he paid no thought to the matter—he gave Dr. Kelly and his colleagues permission to go ahead.

The Secretary of State gave his permission in December. Three weeks later, Dr. Kelly's colleague in the consortium was talking about getting £4 million from Dumbartonshire Enterprise to upgrade the structure of Loch Lomond. Dr. Kelly is on record as saying of Dumbarton district council that there were ideological reasons and "irrational" political reasons. He said of the council:

"They don't like private houses, that's 1950s"

mentality.

I have some information for the Minister. Dumbarton district council unanimously refused permission, and the Tory group on the council rejected Dr. Kelly's proposal.

Dr. Kelly and his colleagues have now sold out. They went cap in hand to Dumbartonshire Enterprise, and said that they did not have the funds to go ahead with the development, despite boasts about what they would for the area. They asked Dumbartonshire Enterprise, "What will you do?" and Dumbartonshire Enterprise—a public body—is buying the land for £3 million.

It is scandalous in the first instance that the Secretary of State gave planning permission, but I applaud Dumbartonshire Enterprise, because this is an opportunity for a public body to intervene in the public interest for the good of the many, not the few. It is a classic example.

The Secretary of State has an awful lot to answer for on the issue. Had he accepted the Hutchison committee's report on any developers having to demonstrate their economic viability, he would not have got himself into this sorry mess. The local community is utterly against him in this matter, and, as I said, that goes across the entire political spectrum.

The Scottish Office released the greatest sleight-of-hand press release on Monday, in which it stated:

"Funding of some £2.85 million over the next three years will be available to support the protection of the beautiful Loch Lomond and Trossachs area of Scotland."

I asked the House of Commons Library to look into the issue of new money, because the Government's response does not refer at all to finance. The Hutchison committee's report recommended more than £1 million in the first instance and 75 per cent. funding from central Government, but there is nothing in the document asbout nthe Hutchison committee's recommendations.

The Library contacted the Scottish Office yesterday about new money, and wrote to me with this reply:

"Unfortunately, all the Scottish Office officials who deal with this are presently on the train from Edinburgh to London for tomorrow's debate. However, a colleague of theirs in Scotland tried to help and said that . . . although they know there is extra funding they are not sure if it is 'new'.

Scottish Natural Heritage's Loch Lomond office say that they are not sure exactly how the money is being made up and only know that the Scottish Office will make £850,000 available through Scottish Natural Heritage next year on top of SNH's support for the Park Authority."

That is a disgraceful situation. I charge the Minister with political sleight of hand in asserting that there is new money. I want chapter and verse about finance and where it is coming from when he comes to the Dispatch Box.

On a charitable basis, if we accept that there is new money, is it project-specific? Who will decide on the money—will it be a local body such as the Loch Lomond park authority, or will the park authority have to go on its knees to SNH to get the money? The track record in that area of SNH and others is not good.

Like the Minister, the chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage, Mr. Magnus Magnusson, has never come to one of my Loch Lomond conferences during the past few years. Mr. Magnusson has been a dutiful assistant and steward to the Government, but he is not doing very much on the environment or to assist local communities with their future.

Finally, on Loch Lomond, the urgency of the matter and the mechanisms for the new joint committee, I must refer to a speech by John Foster at the last conference that I convened. He was director of the Peak district national park from 1954 to 1968, and a director of the Countryside Commission from 1968 to 1985. The Countryside Commission is the organisation that the Minister set up to look into Loch Lomond in the late 1980s. It recommended national park status—a recommendation that the Secretary of State ignored.

Mr. Foster is also a member of Nature and National Parks for Europe. He said in his speech to my conference:

"Quite simply, I believe that Loch Lomond and the Trossachs are so important that whatever powers are necessary to protect them from further deterioration should be put in place here and now. This really is fundamental to success in securing and implementing the range of planning and management strategies so badly needed for the area. There is not time for experimenting with less positive solutions. That is just fiddling while Loch Lomond burns—or, more accurately, while it deteriorates further . . . I believe it is vital to success to put in place an adequate mechanism for the management of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs now—not in 5 or 10 years time."

Sadly, the Secretary of State has moved the responsibility on to local authorities, at a time when they are up to their eyes in devising new structures for all the serious responsibilities they will have in the next year. Loch Lomond will not be their number one priority, because they are dealing with political issues across the whole local government spectrum.

In the interval, I will call another meeting about Loch Lomond, and I guarantee that between 100 and 150 people will attend. I hope that this time, belatedly, the Secretary of State will come along and listen to the local community. If the Government do not do anything, the official Opposition will do something. As soon as we get into government, we will establish a national park for Loch Lomond, so that we become part of the family of national parks in Europe, and at last something positive will be done for the environment and conservation in that most beautiful part of Scotland.

11.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I am pleased to reply to this debate. When an hon. Member tables a subject for a detailed debate, however, it is a pity that so little time is left for the Minister to reply, as it is most important to hear what the Government have to say.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on obtaining this debate, because he has shown a commendable interest in the natural heritage over the years. For that reason, I am a little disappointed that he spent most of his speech being so highly critical of landlords in Scotland. I listened carefully, and he did not even give credit to some landlords who are exceptionally good. By and large, he seemed to go down the road of compulsory purchase and compulsory ownership of land by the nation, which is certainly not a route down which I would wish to go. We want to be positive.

This debate has been incredibly negative—all "No, No, No", and turning down everything that one can think of. Hon. Members asked about "Parks for Life". Of course, we warmly welcomed it, because it runs in line with our plans for the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond.

In the short time left, I shall set out the Government's view of the main issues and the actions that we have taken to protect and enhance those large areas of Scotland that many would call wilderness.

The issue is one of management. The hon. Member for Western Isles spent too much time on ownership, but it is not ownership but how the land is managed that matters. That is where we put our emphasis, especially through Scottish Natural Heritage. We want to think about protection and enhancement of the natural heritage, enabling people who live in those areas to continue to derive worthwhile livings from them, the maintenance of the social systems around which such communities are constructed, and providing access for visitors.

Increasingly, our tourism is based on high-quality niche markets, such as country sports and those interested in wildlife. For many, the experience of wide open spaces without crowds is enough.

Wild land is not a new interest in Scotland. Many agencies have considered what needs to be done to maintain the value of our wild land, but we have to go forward with the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of what has happened in the past.

The mechanisms for achieving appropriate management have been subject to change in the past century. For example, the crofting system, on which the hon. Member for Western Isles is an expert, has provided the custodians of large areas of the north and west. Crofting offers a system of land management and a social structure which has bound nature and crofters together in partnership. I am glad that all the grant and loan schemes have been kept in place and enhanced wherever possible, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

Mr. Macdonald: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Hector Monro: Quickly, because time is rushing on.

Mr. Macdonald: The budget for environmentally sensitive areas was underspent by 8 per cent. in the last financial year and 7 per cent. in the previous financial year, which amounts to £4 million and £3 million respectively. Why cannot that be used to increase grants to crofters, and why cannot some of it be used to allow communities to buy Forestry Commission woodland that is up for disposal?

Sir Hector Monro: I will come to expenditure later.

Even the most remote hill grazing was managed by crofting townships. At the heart of the system lies the concept of consent and partnership. Crofting is a good example of a management system in which ownership is secondary to good management. In Scotland, I see little case to be made for the view that good management necessarily requires ownership to be in the hands of the state or some independent structure.

Our landowners, whether of large estates or of smaller parcels in the hands of farmers and crofters, have long shown a deep understanding of the ways of nature, and they are keen to manage the land for the wider good.

We are convinced that the voluntary principle remains the basis for the management of our wild areas. When all concerned enter into arrangements voluntarily and work in a partnership with a common aim, the outcome is likely to be accepted by the community.

The voluntary principle, as well as providing the basis for moving forward with the greatest possible support, also offers flexibility. The basis for the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which I took through the House, is that voluntary principle, with compulsory back-up powers when required. By and large, it has stood the test of time pretty well.

The role of Scottish Natural Heritage—which was criticised by many hon. Members today—is vital. Our perception now is that the natural heritage of Scotland as a whole needs the benefit of an organisation to design and put in place a strategic approach. We have done that by introducing the successor body to the Countryside Commission for Scotland and the Nature Conservancy Council.

Those organisations came together to form SNH, which has been a great success, bearing in mind the fact that it has been in place for only three years. I give tremendous credit to the chairman, Magnus Magnusson. We have made significant steps forward under his leadership, particularly on the regionalisation of SNH, so that the organisation is much closer to the man in the countryside and the rural areas of Scotland.

Opposition Members, who tend to overlook the Government's commitment to conservation, should remember that, in 1991-92, the Countryside Commission for Scotland and the NCCS received £25 million from the Government. In 1992-1993, the SNH received £34.6 million, and this coming year it will receive £41 million. Those substantial increases show the strong commitment of the Government to nature conservation in Scotland. We are committed over the next three years to fund conservation to the tune of £120 million.

I shall quickly refer to two issues which were raised in relation to the Cairngorms and to Loch Lomond. We set up the Cairngorms inquiry under Magnus Magnusson, which reported back in March 1993. The Government accepted the recommendation to set up a partnership, and that is going extremely well. Sir David Laird, who has taken over the chairmanship, will be able to announce the members of the partnership in a matter of weeks, and there should be an increased local government representation.

[Sir Hector Monro]

The Cairngorm partnership will be up and working in a relatively short time, and I am confident that it will be a significant factor in developing conservation in that part of Scotland. It will be funded by SNH, and it is expected that an office will be established in Grantown-on-Spey in the next couple of weeks.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) gave some erroneous information about Loch Lomond, and my announcement in Glasgow on Monday was far removed from the impression that he tried to give today. I noticed that *The Herald* has stated that the hon. Gentleman said that I was kicking Sir Peter Hutchison in the teeth, but the Government have accepted his whole report—lock, stock and barrel. Every one of a very large number of recommendations in the report have been accepted. I do not see how any Government could do more than accept what they have been offered in a report, and I welcome Sir Peter's report strongly.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton seems to misunderstand the joint board, which can, if agreed, hand over planning powers to the three authorities involved. The hon. Gentleman is very negative in his attitude.

The Government accept that the park authority is made up of two regional councils and two district councils, but the two regional councils will disappear, and their areas will be added to Argyll and Bute council. I see no reason why democratically elected bodies wanting to do their best for their own areas should not come together voluntarily with a positive approach to manage the Trossachs and Loch Lomond to the highest possible standards. It is negative and wrong for the hon. Gentleman to think that it will all be a failure.

Opposition Members have been highly critical of things which they allege we have not done. We were asked in the report to do something rapidly about byelaws, and we have done that. The Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill last year contained references to byelaws, and those will hopefully be in place in a matter of weeks.

The byelaws will control maritime operations on the loch, and will assist in setting up a range of services. A boat has been ordered and will be ready soon, and we hope that speeds of boats on the loch will be controlled, and that areas for every sport will be looked after adequately. The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong to wave pieces of paper and say that we have done nothing.

There are powers in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act to set up joint boards, which could be voluntary or—if we ever wanted to do this in the future—compulsory. I hope that it will never be necessary to do the latter. Much has been done to prepare the paperwork for the three new local authorities which are responsible for Loch Lomond, and it is right that we should wait until April 1996 for the change. It would have been wrong to carry out the change this year, as two of the authorities are going out of existence in a year's time.

That does not in any way stop those authorities from supporting the park authority in doing all the work required this year. That is why we have provided substantial funding for the next three years of nearly £3 million. That figure includes £340,000 to the ranger and marine service, and £460,000 to be spent in the Trossachs area to deal with the trails, rights of way, tracks and visitor facilities. Much has been going on, and it is quite wrong for the hon. Member for Dumbarton and others to give the impression that there has been an unnecessary delay.

Some of the statements in the press have been quite wrong. In *The Herald* today, Lady Glasgow has called for a joint board with planning powers, but those powers will exist if that is what the three authorities wish. They will have the planning authority, despite what was said so wrongly in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday. Other comments—particularly in the *Scottish Daily Express*—have welcomed the steps which we are taking to develop the park.

I would have liked to go into some detail on the important issues of deer and forestry in Scotland, but unfortunately I do not have the time to do so. We should certainly pay tribute to the Red Deer Commission for the way in which it has set up deer management groups. It has substantially improved culls, and is providing an acceptable habitat for deer herds in Scotland.

On forestry, we have made a good start in Glen Affric, and special grants have been made available for Scots pine. We are moving towards fulfilling our European directives on habitats and on birds. I wanted to pay tribute to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Government are providing large sums of money to voluntary organisations which are doing a good job.

I also want to say something about mountain safety, and I pay tribute to those involved in mountain rescue services and the police. I must say yet again—I have said it umpteen times this winter and last winter—that we want people to come to the Scottish highlands to enjoy hill walking and mountaineering, but they must listen to warnings about avalanches and bad weather, and they must remember the short period of daylight that is available in midwinter in Scotland.

All in all, we have a great deal to discuss. I wanted to talk positively, not negatively, about those matters, as I believe that we have an immense duty to the highlands and wildernesses of Scotland to provide the best possible service we can and ensure that they are enhanced, and not run down, as the hon. Member for Dumbarton said they were.

The highlands are the most wonderful and precious asset to us in Scotland. In the main, they have been well looked after by many different owners, good and sometimes, sadly, bad. By and large, the farmers, landlords and landowners of Scotland have done an immense amount to enhance Scotland's scenery. I want to ensure that, through SNH, that continues and improves, and the management of Scotland's land is in the best possible hands. We have set up the management and policies to ensure that that is carried out adequately in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We now move on to the debate on local government in Birmingham.

Local Government (Birmingham)

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Before I call the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), may I say that it is obvious from the number of hon. Members in the Chamber that there is a great deal of interest in the debate, so I make a plea for brief contributions by hon. Members both on the Back and on the Front Benches.

11.30 am

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): For months now, there have been hints, rumours and press reports showing that something fishy is going on in Labour-controlled Birmingham city council; but until I started to bring all the allegations together and listed and tabulated reports and events, I did not know the half of it.

It is important to say at the outset that Birmingham city council receives some £1.16 billion per annum from taxpayers and business rate payers. That is a considerable sum in any man's language. There is no doubt that substantial sums have been chiselled from that budget and misused. Other sums have disappeared without trace. Furthermore, it now seems that large sums have been misappropriated to gain political advantage for the Labour party in Birmingham, and some money has been used to help extremists against moderate Labour.

I therefore make two separate charges against the Labour controllers of Birmingham city council: first, misuse; and, secondly, misappropriation. I propose to deal with each separately. On the first issue, on 12 January—just over two months ago—I raised at Prime Minister's Question Time the case of Nancy Johnson, who was paid £42,000 per annum to be head of the women's unit in Birmingham. At that time, an investigation had apparently gone on into Ms Johnson's conduct in that office, and I naturally assumed that she had been suspended pending the outcome of the inquiry. After all, if a doctor, or anyone else in any public office, is accused of misbehaviour, he or she is removed to prevent that person from doing further damage while an inquiry is pending—

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Except Tory Members who take £1,000 per question.

Dame Jill Knight: I shall not take ridiculous interventions, especially from a Front-Bench Member. If that is the best that the hon. Gentleman can do, I shall challenge him on that one.

Although anyone else would have been suspended because of allegations of continued misconduct, Ms Johnson was allowed to continue in post at £42,000 per annum. However, the investigation into her conduct must have found that something was wrong, for the council paid her £11,000 to shut up and go away. We do not know what the inquiry found, because all its findings were kept totally secret and, although the Conservative leader of the council and the Conservative group on the council asked for details of the investigation, none was given.

What we do know is that that woman was also chairman of the Harambee housing association, which I dare say she looked on as another nice little earner because it lost £250,000 of ratepayers' money—*[Interruption.]* It is certainly public money. There is no question about that.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No, I will not. [HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Lady is wrong."] I am most certainly not wrong to say that the Harambee housing association lost £250,000 of ratepayers' money. *[Interruption.]* If the Opposition seriously suggest that it does not matter if someone wastes public money but matters only if someone wastes council money, that is an extraordinary allegation to make.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The subject of this debate is clearly listed as "Local government in Birmingham". May I therefore have a ruling from you on whether the hon. Lady or, for that matter, other hon. Members, can raise issues that are in no way related to local government spending, as was the point which she just raised?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Had the right hon. Gentleman listened attentively, he would have recognised that, so far, the hon. Lady has been entirely in order.

Mr. Rooker: No, she has not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman might reflect that I spent a great many years in local government.

Dame Jill Knight: Ms Johnson appears to be a friendly soul, and she got her friends in on the act, including one who already worked full time as head of a council-run children's home in the city. That woman claimed—she was paid without a murmur—that she was working 416 hours a month, or 104 hours a week. I presume that that was 52 hours a week for the Harambee housing association and 52 hours a week for the city council-run home. She was paid without a murmur out of the public purse for working 416 hours a month when she could not possibly have been working anything like that.

Another Harambee worker under Ms Johnson's chairmanship asked for and received £500 from the council for "black women's therapy and social action". Normally, when one receives money from the council for such causes, one must fill in a grant application form, which must be sanctioned by responsible persons. No grant application form was ever filled in or sanctioned. The money was apparently paid over with no inquiries. Precisely how it was spent is a mystery.

Apart from all that money disappearing without visible trace, I maintain that setting up a women's unit is a misuse of ratepayers' money. After all, why not have a men's unit as well? Otherwise, is that not in contravention of sex discrimination legislation? Birmingham women's unit is currently putting on an international women's festival, and I have the programme before me. Even the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, which is certainly not anti-Labour—*[Interruption.]* It is certainly not—[HON. MEMBERS: "But Fowler is its chairman."] Now who is raising matters outside the subject of the debate? My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)is more than capable of answering for himself, if he is given the opportunity to do so.

Last week, the local paper had a headline saying that it is "hard not to knock" the women's festival. It can say that again. The unit spent some £500,000 per annum of

[Dame Jill Knight]

Government grant, which should go to the people of Birmingham. Let us look at the festival programme and see what can be done under such a great effort subsidised by ratepayers. People can go to a tea dance—that would be fun. I have nothing against tea dances, except when they are subsidised by the city council. I am sure that, if my hon. Friends attended such an event, they would be happy to pay the full price, and would not ask the ratepayers to foot the bill.

Alternatively, senior citizens can attend a nostalgia afternoon at the Grand hotel with tea and cakes. That will cost £2 as part of the subsidised women's festival; otherwise, it will cost double that amount. One can go sequence dancing for £1.50. There are still more goodies to come. People can join a domestic violence residents club. I do not know whether that means that one can go along and learn how to commit domestic violence; the programme does not explain what it is about. *[Interruption.]* You are scared to death—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the Chair is prepared to hear comments like the one that came from the Opposition Front Bench just then. I would be grateful if Front Benchers would remain quiet, or else ask to intervene in the proper way.

Dame Jill Knight: One can learn Egyptian dancing or—this is a good one—explore escape through the use of soundbeam. Does that not sound intriguing? One can investigate lesbianism, undergo assertiveness training—I bet Ms Johnson did not need any assertiveness training—or listen to dialogues with seven mad women. All those activities are in the women's festival programme.

The festival does investigate a few—but not many—useful subjects. However, if one wants to learn how to succeed in business or about self-defence or Japanese porcelain, one should not expect to do so using ratepayers' money, thus depriving others of much-needed council services. Many of my constituents live in houses and flats where water runs down the walls, the doors do not fit and the windows let in the rain.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No, I will not give way. Plenty of people wish to speak in the debate, and no doubt they will do so.

Many of my constituents face difficulties in their council homes. I listen to them talk about their troubles and I contact the council. Sometimes the repairs are done and the officials try to be helpful. They explain about the cuts in council funding. It is no wonder that its funding has been cut when the council funds rubbish like the women's festival.

What am I supposed to say to an 80-year-old woman who cannot get a home help to keep her house clean—"Never mind, dear, why don't you let the house go hang and nip across to the Ladywood arts and leisure centre, to hear a talk about Islam in Africa"? That little gem from the festival programme will not help that lady to get her house clean.

Swimming baths are being closed in Birmingham because it is alleged that not enough Government money is allocated to that city. Those baths are being closed while money is being wasted. Library opening hours are being reduced, creating serious problems for many Birmingham people who have always used those library facilities. Worst of all, some homes in Birmingham still do not have indoor lavatories. I think that it is absolutely scandalous that money is being wasted on a women's festival when people still have to go down the garden path to the lavatory at night in the snow and the rain. That is a disgrace.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No, I will not give way to any hon. Members. I have too many questions and answers myself, and I hope that there will be plenty of time for other hon. Members to put their oar in.

There cannot be any excuse for spending money on activities like the women's festival while people still do not have indoor lavatories. I am astonished that any hon. Member would defend that position.

So scandalous is Labour's misuse of grant money that the national papers are now sitting up and taking notice. One reported that a so-called Muslim unemployment project has pocketed £41,000 of ratepayers' money. That project did not provide any jobs, although it has been suggested that it certainly secured Labour votes. No accounts from the project were ever published, despite the fact that a large amount of money was spent. The House should not be surprised about that, because the project treasurer cannot read or write. He is totally illiterate in his own language, which is not English. I think that it is surprising to expect someone who cannot read or write to produce proper treasurer's reports.

One cannot help suspecting that he was put into that position as a patsy. Two Labour councillors, Mohammed Azam and Haider Zaman, seem to have masterminded the project, although they did not issue any treasurer's reports. A third Labour councillor, Ghazanfar Khan, was originally involved. He was forced to resign in a hurry after his planning application for a curry house in a residential area passed through the council on a whipped Labour vote.

The minority resource centre lost £13,000 per annum. Its secretary was Councillor Abdul Malik and the main worker at the centre was the councillor's nephew. I am not sure what that organisation does, but it is linked with the Bangladeshi Workers Association—which receives £24,000 per annum—through Councillor Malik. Neither organisation has any idea where that money has gone. A press report dealing with the matter said that an "unquantifiable amount of money has disappeared". Some of the vanishing thousands may have been spent within the letter of the law, but I would be very surprised if they were spent within the spirit of the law.

How can it be ethical for another Labour councillor, Councillor Rabani, to receive a grant of £52,000 to repair his house? It would cost a lot less than that to deal with damp in the homes of my constituents. Councillor Chauhan has received £11,000 to repair his house. There is nothing like ensuring undying allegiance to the Labour party with a good hefty cheque. It must be wrong to buy votes using taxpayers' money. It is pretty sleazy to buy votes with one's own money; it is very sleazy to buy them with public money.

There have been a number of press reports about the allegations, the latest of which involved a trade union centre in Birmingham which has received £1 million in

ratepayers' money since 1986. Chunks of that money were apparently diverted to a hard left campaigning organisation through Councillor Mick Rice, who was able to channel cash from the former organisation to the latter because he was a member of both organisations. All that now remains of that £1 million expenditure is a few worn desks, chairs and filing cabinets—and a few secured Labour votes.

Councillor Mick Rice also seems to be extremely influential. A document which came into my hands only this morning gives chapter and verse of how moderate trade union activity has been sabotaged by a hard left group. According to the document, there has been serious misappropriation of local authority funds in order to aid that effort. It says that work has been commissioned fraudulently.

In fact, the entire document is an appalling catalogue of deceit. I am advised that Councillor Rice strongly opposed calls for any investigation of what had gone on, and claimed that he could ensure that Councillor Theresa Stewart, who is the head of the Labour group on the Birmingham city council, would be amenable to blocking any such inquiry. No such inquiry has taken place. I believe that my charge of misappropriation stands.

Finally, also under that head, I want to touch on the extremely unequal way in which money allocated by the Government to Birmingham is distributed in what certainly appears to be a blatant attempt to buy votes. Out of 841 grants to voluntary bodies, the lion's share goes to those parts of Birmingham that elect Labour councillors and Members of Parliament: Aston, Handsworth, Nechells, Small Heath, Soho, Sparkbrook and Sparkhill with Ladywood at the top of the list, receiving more than 100 grants totalling some £7 million. My constituency is only just across the road from Ladywood.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No.

Mr. Burden *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Lady has made it clear that she is not giving way.

Dame Jill Knight: The allegations that I make are far too serious to commit to memory. I have chapter and verse for all of them, and none of the barracking and bad behaviour of the Opposition will shut me up.

In Ladywood, more than 100 grants have been made, totalling £7 million. My constituency has received seven in Harborne, which is just across the road from Ladywood and two in Quinton. If anyone thinks that there is no deprivation in parts of my constituency, they are wrong. There are areas of Quinton where there is serious deprivation. There have been only two grants to the areas that need help in my patch. There are more one-parent families in Quinton than in any other part of Birmingham. I hope that all those allegations will be properly investigated by the Nolan committee.

Birmingham is a great city; it is a proud and honourable city. Its citizens deserve better than this.

11.51 am

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) has raised this debate not out of concern for the people of Birmingham but out of concern for the Birmingham Conservative councillors, who were almost wiped out in the last local election.

Dame Jill Knight: Nonsense.

Mr. Hattersley: Does the hon. Lady intend to persist in behaving like this, or will she behave with the dignity appropriate to her years?

The hon. Lady has shown concern for the councillors of Birmingham, who were virtually wiped out at the last municipal election. What we have seen is a re-run, in an even sillier version, of the party political broadcast that Conservative central office—in its folly—produced before the last municipal elections. The allegations have displayed the same triviality. Indeed, there was a moment when I thought that we were going to hear yet again about the horrendous scandal of the gravedigger discovered to be in possession of a mobile telephone.

I know that the hon. Lady is not in a mood to answer questions, but it would be interesting if she could tell us two things. What percentage of the total budget—the budget which she told us raised more than £1 billion from the electors of Birmingham—do the awful misexpenditures that she has reported represent? How many decimal places are required to discover the percentage of funds about which, in her trivial way, the hon. Lady has chosen to speak today? I am sure that she will not give us the figure, so let me ask her two other questions.

First, the hon. Lady spoke in the most florid language about allegations of misappropriation of funds and related matters. Had it not been a rather feeble political exercise, the most appropriate way for her to proceed as a Member of Parliament for the city would have been to report the allegations one by one to the district auditor. How many has she reported?

Dame Jill Knight: I am waiting for Nolan. This is much too serious for anything but a totally independent top-level inquiry.

Mr. Hattersley: We shall look forward to seeing whether Nolan actually reports explicitly on the various groups within the City of Birmingham, and we shall look forward to seeing why the hon. Lady does not regard the district auditor as an independent arbiter in these matters.

There is a further series of allegations which the hon. Lady was wise enough not to raise. They appeared on the front page of the *Observer*, and I shall touch on them for constituency reasons. As soon as the allegations appeared—they contained not the slightest suggestion of illegality or of money being illegally used, but only the suggestion of political rather than any other impropriety—the leader of Birmingham council, on her own initiative, referred the matter to the district auditor.

An interesting comparison can be drawn with the ex-leader of Westminster city council who—as the woman described as intentionally gerrymandering and using public funds to obtain votes for the Tory party—was also involved with the district auditor. The hon. Member for Edgbaston now appears to be concentrating on her correspondence. Which council leader would she prefer to work with—the one who, as soon as there is the faintest whiff of scandal, chooses—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a general conviction that

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

hon. Members do not throw accusations across the House. If my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) is responding to a note from the *Official Report*, the right hon. Gentleman should withdraw his last remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can safely leave the procedure of the Chamber in the hands of the Chair.

Mr. Hattersley: I shall wait for the hon. Lady to pass her envelope along and then ask again which council leader would she prefer to work with—the one who, of her own volition, at the faintest whiff of scandal referred the whole matter to the district auditor, or the leader of the Westminster Tory flagship borough, who is herself the subject of a district auditor's inquiry?

Dame Jill Knight: My impression is that the debate concerns Birmingham city council and nothing else.

Mr. Rooker: You have failed in your duty.

Dame Jill Knight: I never fail in my duty.

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Lady might at least have the grace to repeat what I have just said—that the behaviour of the leader of Birmingham city council in this particular was admirable in every detail and should be applauded and supported by Members of Parliament who wish to ensure that corruption does not besmirch the city.

I wish to say a few words about the allegations in the *Observer* newspaper some weeks ago. It suggested that nothing illegal had been done, but it was concerned with how grants for improving derelict property were being obtained. The allegation was that the council—rightly but vaguely, in my view—tried to bring some order out of the chaos which had been caused by the Tory party in two ways: first, by not allocating enough money for improvements and, secondly, by inventing a crazy system for the allocation of the grants. The council failed to do that, and there were arguments about how some people should obtain the full rights to which they were entitled under the law. It was that and no more.

There is a crisis about housing improvement grants in Birmingham, but it is a crisis which has been brought about because there is so much decrepit property and so little Government assistance in putting that decrepit property right. As the hon. Lady knows, the leader of Birmingham council invited all the Conservative councillors—and, indeed, councillors of every political persuasion—to join a delegation to the Department of the Environment to ask for more money to make housing in Birmingham not right but better.

The hon. Lady spoke with what she regards as eloquence about housing conditions in her constituency. I understand that the leader of the council is to invite all the city Members of Parliament to see the Secretary of State for the Environment to see whether more money can be obtained under the housing investment programme. Will the hon. Lady come with us to lobby the Secretary of State for the Environment for more HIP money for Birmingham?

Dame Jill Knight: I do not think that it is a particularly good idea to conduct a dialogue across the Floor of the House, as it may take time from other hon. Members who wish to speak. Nevertheless, I will answer the right hon. Gentleman's question. As I have repeatedly made clear today, if large amounts were not wasted on ridiculous nonsense, there would be plenty of money available to meet Birmingham's needs.

Mr. Hattersley: I shall continue to give way to the hon. Lady as often as she wishes me to. The more she says, the more she demonstrates that she is interested only in the politics, not in the city. She has not been able to tell us how much money has been wasted, or how many houses could have been improved if there had been a total saving. She has not been able to tell us how many grants would have been extended. All she has managed to do is to produce the usual smears and allegations—generally unsubstantiated, and certainly unquantified.

This has been a year of extraordinary municipal achievement for Birmingham. But for a reduction of nearly £20 million in Government grant, the citizens of Birmingham would probably pay less for their municipal services next year than they paid last year. Despite a year of stringency—forced on the council by an arbitrarily low cap, and by cuts in grants which have always been small—the city has been perhaps uniquely successful in improving its education provision. Three weeks ago, when I last spoke in the House, the Secretary of State for Education preached a sermon to local councils, saying that, even in these desperate days they should find more money for education, fund the teachers' pay increase, extend coverage in the classrooms and preserve education standards. Birmingham has done exactly that.

This morning—purely by coincidence—the Joseph Chamberlain college, which stands between my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Edgbaston, wrote to me about some specific problems. The letter began by congratulating Birmingham city council on increasing the number of teachers despite the year's financial problems. This year Birmingham will have more than 500 extra teachers. It is taking precisely the action that the Government have told education authorities that they should take despite the difficulties that they are experiencing.

Why, when talking about Birmingham, does the peripatetic hon. Member for Edgbaston—she is now moving gaily from seat to seat—choose to concentrate on matters attracting trivial criticism rather than on matters which merit legitimate and major congratulation?

I see that the chairman of the group which owns the *Birmingham Evening Mail* is with us today. The last time he was invited to join a parliamentary delegation, he failed to do so—even though his own paper had organised the event, the purpose of which was to raise the issues of press freedom and the levying of value added tax on newspapers. He was too busy to go to Downing street with the other Birmingham Members of Parliament. I hope that in one of its editorials his paper will consider the following proposition: is increasing education spending in a year of unique stringency, and increasing the number of schoolteachers by more than 500, a virtue which more than outweighs the creation of a class in which elderly ladies can be taught to dance?

I believe that the people of Birmingham will know what is important in their city's municipal government, and I think that they will realise that the council has done a good

job this year. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Edgbaston, who—in her lack of wisdom—has enabled my hon. Friends and me to put some of the real facts on record.

11.3 am

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): The defence advanced by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was very unconvincing, and at times entered the realms of indescribable pomposity. When he addressed the issue at all, he seemed to be saying that only a small amount of public money was at stake, that the whole issue was trivial and that we should therefore consider other factors. The House should not accept that argument.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) on raising this issue. It should be made clear that the issue is the misuse of public funds.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Alleged.

Sir Norman Fowler: The alleged misuse of public funds—I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

There are other occasions on which we can debate the issues of government and local government, and wider issues. This morning we are discussing a much more specific question: whether funds provided by the public—the taxpayer—have been properly used. I intend to concentrate on the events of the past few weeks, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston has provided a long list relating to a long period. I shall deal in particular with charges that have been made about the misuse of housing renewal grants, for a specific reason.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook accused us of seeking to make party political capital. The unique feature of the cases that have been raised is that they were not raised by Tory Members of Parliament or by the so-called Tory press, and they certainly were not manufactured by Midland Independent Newspapers. I declare an interest as non-executive chairman of the group—when we last debated matters of this kind, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made something of that.

The charges relating to renewal grants were made by a Labour Member of Parliament, supported by at least some Labour councillors, and have been reported in the national press by a newspaper which supports the Labour party. They were made by Labour against Labour. Let us be clear about this: it is not a Tory conspiracy—the whistle was blown by Labour supporters.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who used to be deputy leader of the Labour party, did not dwell on an even more extraordinary fact: as a direct result of those charges, no fewer than four Labour constituency parties have been suspended. A party investigation is taking place and Labour's public relations machine has stressed at every stage how seriously it takes the affair.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

One can imagine the outcry that would have resulted if a single Conservative association in Birmingham—[Hon. Members: "What about Westminster?"] I shall deal with Westminster shortly. In this instance, four Labour associations have been suspended. As Opposition Members well know, they would be expressing outrage if Conservative associations were involved, and their Front Bench would already be apportioning blame. Let me tell the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), who is my next-door neighbour in the area, that I certainly do not intend to apportion blame, for reasons that I shall come to. Suffice it to say that I can think of no other recent occasion on which four associations have been suspended as a result of such charges.

Let us consider the history of those charges. On 9 February, in an Adjournment debate, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker)—who is present in the Chamber—raised the issue of housing renewal in Birmingham. He criticised the operation of the grants, and went on to say specifically:

"Regrettably, the operation of the mandatory grant system of the renovation grants allows it to be used for the purposes of political patronage in Birmingham."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 558.]

I respect the hon. Member for Perry Barr for setting out his views in that way.

A couple of weeks later, on Sunday 26 February, the *Observer* took up the story. Whatever Opposition Members may feel about other papers, I do not believe that they would regard that as a Conservative supporting newspaper—*[Interruption.]* Some Opposition Members appear to have a persecution complex. That paper said:

"Inquiries by *The Observer* have revealed that, in some key inner-city wards, half of all Treasury-funded slum housing renovation grants are being directed to Labour Party members whose votes could help ambitious politicians to secure their local power base."

That report was carried under the headline:

"Labour in £2 million sleaze enquiry".

Once again, the hon. Member for Perry Barr was asked for his comments. According to the *Observer*, he said that there appeared to be a prima facie breach of local government corruption laws and that the matter should be referred to the police. I remind the House that those were the words of a respected Labour Member of Parliament who represents Birmingham. A few days later, *The Guardian* reported that the four constituency associations involved—Small Heath, Ladywood, Sparkbrook and Perry Barr—were being suspended. The inquiry by Peter Coleman, the Labour organisation director, would

"examine allegations that rival candidates for the Sparkbrook seat, to be vacated"

by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook,

"have been soliciting support by giving advice on how to jump the council queue for housing".

I emphasis that all these allegations were made in the past few weeks. My hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston dealt with allegations going back much further than that. I do not intend to try to apportion guilt at this stage. Those who have been accused are entitled to put the case for their defence, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Erdington for raising that issue. I hope that when allegations are made against Conservative councils the Labour party will adopt the same attitude, although I fear that it has not always done so.

I have a constituency point to make in this regard. As the hon. Member for Perry Barr knows, I thought that he was wrong to name my constituent, Mr. John

[Sir Norman Fowler]

Woodcock, in this affair, and I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman has now withdrawn the charges against him.

Mr. Rooker: I welcome the way in which the right hon. Gentleman has begun to set out his arguments. The hon. Member for Edgbaston raised many issues from the past, three of which affected my constituency and all three of which I reported to the appropriate authorities some years ago.

In my speech of 9 February I was unfair to Mr. Woodcock. I apologise to him here and now. I believe that he operated as a professional person, wholly innocent of any of the alleged scams. He is involved in the sense that he is a professional agent carrying out the work, but it was wrong of me to say that he touted for business. I have met him since and he has told me that he agreed with 97 per cent. of my speech—he agrees with the idea of urban renewal carried out on an area basis and not pepper-potted.

The *Observer* contacted me on the Saturday before it published the two articles and read them out to me. The paper confirmed that it, too, had named Woodcock, two firms of solicitors and two agents in the articles. Having heard what was read out to me, I told the newspaper that I did not think it fair or right to include Woodcock's name and that it was not relevant. The newspaper did not include it, and I wrote to Mr. Woodcock explaining that the articles had been read to me on the Saturday, that that was when I gave out the comment about the police, and that I had said that I did not think that his name should be used.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He has made a fair statement, for which my constituent will also be grateful.

Only one issue is at stake in this debate: is there a case to answer in respect of the allegations that I have set out? If there is, how should it be investigated? By setting up their own inquiries the Labour party and the city council have provided their own reply. Self-evidently, they believe that there is a case to be answered and a case which needs investigation.

My fundamental point for the Secretary of State is that the public will not be satisfied with a Labour party investigation or an internal council investigation: they must know that the charges will be thoroughly, independently and fiercely investigated. There must be no cover-up and no smokescreen—

Mr. Hattersley *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: I am just finishing.

That is why I want an assurance from the Secretary of State today that when the district auditor investigates this case—as he surely will, because it has been referred to him—he will be given all the necessary powers and resources to conduct a thorough and independent investigation of what are, after all, very serious allegations involving the misuse of public money.

Above all, the investigation must be carried out speedily. That is the message that should go out—dare I say it—from both sides of the House. We must get to the bottom of this affair at the earliest opportunity. Until we do, I am not prepared to talk about guilt. I only hope that when the Conservative party is the subject of similar allegations the Labour party will adopt the same policy. A year or two from now the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook will no longer be with us, but nothing that I have heard him say in recent years leads me to the conclusion that he would ever support such a policy himself.

12.17 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Small Heath): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) for dealing at some length with the article in *The Observer* of 26 February. I am also grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) for raising the issue.

Before I respond to the fabrications in that article, I should like to make one further point. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield called for an independent inquiry. Two days after the article about Labour being involved in a £2 million sleaze inquiry appeared, I referred the whole matter to the chief constable. I also took the trouble to write to the Home Secretary, in the following terms:

"I am sure you will conclude that the allegations have some similarity to those relating to the highly publicised case involving Westminster city council, and it is obviously of the utmost importance that these matters are properly investigated. If it is found that any form of corruption has occurred, then those responsible should face the law."

The right hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that the Home Secretary has not even bothered to reply.

However, the chief constable did reply. He said, "Thank you, Mr. Godsiff, but from a preliminary look I cannot see that there are any allegations that need to be investigated." I regret that the chief constable did not undertake an investigation, and particularly regret the fact that the Home Secretary was not prepared to use his good offices with the chief constable to encourage an investigation. I believe that the Home Secretary was not particularly interested.

The article that appeared in *The Observer* on 26 February was written by Mr. Dean Nelson—to whom I shall return later—using racy terminology. It began:

"Party members accused of using taxpayers' cash to 'buy' safe Labour House of Commons seat."

It continued:

"Inquiries by The Observer have revealed that in some key inner city wards, half of all Treasury-funded slum housing renovation grants are being directed to Labour Party members . . . It was privately disclosed that between a third and a half of all applicants in some wards were Labour Party members."

One has to read the article a second and third time, because it is difficult to nail down the allegations. There are many references to "an informed source"—

"a senior city councillor who does not wish to be named"

and "a spokesperson" but no one making the allegations is named.

The article continues:

"The area of greatest concern is the Small Heath ward where more than 50 per cent of those awarded grants are party members. The majority of these applicants were presented by Roger Godsiff . . . and his local membership secretary and agent, Gulbahar Khan, one of the city council's most influential members."

When I read that on Monday, I wrote to Dr. Alan Elkin, assistant director of the city's urban renewal programme. He knows all the facts and figures—he provides them to the politicians. I asked Dr. Elkin how many valid housing

renovation grant applications received by the council related to properties in the Small Heath constituency. He answered quickly: one. He added that five other applications had been approved and that four more were valid. *The Observer* article stated that the area of greatest concern was Small Heath, where more than 50 per cent. of grants awarded had gone to Labour party members.

I pressed Dr. Elkin for further information. I asked whether one particular application had been made by the householder or by someone on his behalf, and whether any of the other nine applications had come through myself or my personal assistant, Councillor Khan. Again, Dr Elkin replied quickly:

"The owner of the property where works have been completed and grants paid made an application privately without professional assistance. However, I am not able to divulge the address without the owner's approval. The file and records have been checked and I can confirm that no applications have been submitted via yourself or Councillor Khan."

The article said that the area of greatest concern was Small Heath, where more than 50 per cent. of grants given related to Labour party members.

The Observer article further stated:

"Charles Road, Small Heath, Birmingham. This is the power base of Labour MP Roger Godsiff. It is also the home of his right-hand man, Gulbahar Khan."

That is absolutely right: it is my power base, but every hon. Member has a power base. The residents of Charles road have been extremely supportive of me, for which I am most grateful. It is one of the longest residential roads in Birmingham, containing 322 houses. Of those, 39 are occupied by members of the Labour party. I thought the figure would be much higher, and it should be.

The Observer stated:

"An internal Labour Party inquiry has led to allegations that Charles Road is at the heart of the scandal."

I checked with my party's regional secretary only this week, and she confirmed that no investigation has been authorised or undertaken. More to the point, the chairman of the party's organisation committee has never authorised an investigation. One begins to see that Mr. Dean Nelson's article is based not on fact but fabrications.

I will not read the whole article to the House, but it also implied that another councillor, Raghib Ahsan, had done something improper. That councillor is no friend of mine, but he was doing what he thought was in the best interests of his electorate. He is entitled not to be smeared over the front page of *The Observer*, as I was.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): The hon. Gentleman knows that a number of people in Birmingham are concerned about queue jumping and potential abuse of section 82 procedures. Does he, from his experience of Small Heath ward, know whether section 82 has been used in a partial manner, with the result that people who have been in the queue for a long time have been leapfrogged by people who have not?

Mr. Godsiff: Section 82 relates to council housing, but the majority of Small Heath residents live in owner-occupied properties, so I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman. I am not aware of the figures for the Nechells or Aston wards.

Before reading *The Observer* article, I had never heard of Dean Nelson. Frankly, having read it, I do not want to hear of him again. However, this was not the first time that Mr. Nelson had written scandal articles. In 1990 and 1991, he wrote in *The Independent* about matters relating to local authorities in north Wales. In another article, Mr. Nelson made allegations about a former police officer, who sued *The Independent*, *The Observer*, Harlech Television and *Private Eye*, and was awarded £350,000 damages. At the end of that case, and after giving the matter serious study, Mr. Justice Drake—who is not given to using flowery language—referred to Mr. Nelson's journalistic methods as "plain crookery".

Birmingham has a problem with preserving its housing stock. Many properties in the city are unfit for habitation, and the money available to deal with the stock has been cut dramatically, from £60 million 10 years ago to less than £20 million. That problem of resources should concern all hon. Members representing Birmingham constituencies. Rightly or wrongly, the council decided, not illegally, to base its grants system on queuing and inquiry forms.

The forms had been completed by 9,500 people, but they have no legal standing whatever and if the system ended tomorrow those people would not have a legal leg to stand on. The queuing system is based on a cut-off date of July 1991, which is nearly four years ago. More to the point, the queuing system takes no account whatever of prioritisation. Those who applied after July 1991 and had minor problems of dampness in their properties went on the queuing list, as did those who applied after July 1991 and had no roof, dampness rising from the floor to the ceiling, every piece of wood riddled with woodworm and no hot water. As I have said, there is no prioritisation.

Some 18 months ago, I decided that I was no longer prepared to operate that system. I explained to the leader of the council that, in future when people came to see me, I would tell them the council's policy and its problems. I said that I would explain about the cut-off date and the queuing system. However, I said that, if any constituent said, "Please Mr. Godsiff, help me to get my urban renewal work carried out", I did not intend to deny that person his legal entitlement to know his rights. That is what I did, that is what I shall continue to do, and I make no apology for doing it.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield for mentioning John Woodcock. Since I spoke to the leader of the council, I took care to ensure that anybody I passed on went to Mr. John Woodcock, a person of integrity and competence, who would deal properly with applications and would not rip people off. I took the trouble to interview him, not on my own but with another Birmingham Member, to ascertain that he was a person of integrity and competence. Everybody I have referred to him has spoken highly of the way in which he dealt with these matters.

I hold 11 advice bureau surgeries a month in my constituency and I have a full-time advice centre which is open five days a week. A huge number of people come to see me, many of them with urban renewal problems. My constituents are among the most disadvantaged in the country. I say with great respect that they are not middle-class people who know the law. They do not know the law, and they certainly do not know their entitlements. When they come to me as their Member of Parliament, they come to seek help, and many of them do not even have English as their first language.

I do not make the slightest apology in the House or anywhere else for helping my constituents to get their legal entitlements, because that is their right. I am sorry

[Mr. Godsiff]

if, by doing that, I offend some people on the city council because it causes problems with their system. I will join those people in making representations to the Government for more resources, because that is what it is all about.

I suggested to the leader of the council that the 9,500 inquiry forms should be placed in front of the Secretary of State, and that he should be asked what to do with them. The 1989 Act is his legislation, and it is up to him to make sure that resources are available. I say again that my constituents are entitled to advice, and that I shall continue to give it when they come to see me. That advice will be given freely by me, irrespective of race, religion or colour.

12.33 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Labour party believes that wrongdoing in local or central Government or anywhere else should be rooted out without fear or favour. In local government, it should be rooted out whether it occurs in Labour, Tory or Liberal councils. We condemn wrongdoing wherever it occurs, but, unlike the Tory party, we also take action.

In Birmingham, charges of wrongdoing have arisen in connection with renovation grants. The immediate response to that from the Labour leader of the council was to call for a report from the district auditor. In an immediate response to the first article in *The Observer*, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) referred the matter to the police, as he has explained. He also referred it to the Home Secretary. In so far as there were charges relating to what might be wrongful actions within the Labour party, the party immediately announced a thorough investigation and closed four of the local branches to make sure that, if anything wrong had been done, it did not affect any selection or election that might be proceeding. That was right.

As a result of Labour action—not action by anyone else—there is an investigation by the district auditor, some sort of investigation by the police and an investigation by the Labour party. That is all at the instigation of the Labour party, and it was done without fear of favour. That is similar to the approach that we have adopted in Lambeth, Liverpool and other places. I contrast that with the record of the Tories when wrongdoing has occurred in Tory councils. When Wandsworth council was found guilty by the district auditor of breaking the law in relation to the homeless and carrying on headlong with its policy of selling council houses when people had nowhere to live, a vice-chairman of the Tory party, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), said on television that he was proud of that council's record—its law-breaking record!

In Westminster, the district auditor has made it clear that he thinks that the homes-for-votes scandal has cost £21 million and that the failure to collect service and repair charges from leaseholders may have cost £31 million. No investigation was instigated by the Tories who were in charge at Westminster: the Tory party in that council has been obstructive at every turn.

No Tory Minister and, to the best of my knowledge, no Tory Member has ever uttered one word of condemnation about Westminster council in relation to these scandals. Far from it: they have continued to defend the council. As I have said, that is in marked contrast to Labour's attitude to wrongdoing everywhere. Labour does something about it, but the Tories never utter a harsh word against their friends.

I do not know, nor do I think that any hon. Member knows, whether there has been wrongdoing in Birmingham. If there has been, it will be rooted out by Labour; but the issue is used as an excuse to attack the great city of Birmingham and its people. That great city and its ingenious and hard-working people, whose reputation for building and making is legendary throughout the world, have been hard hit by the recession, and the city council has done its desperate best not to take things lying down but to protect the people of that great city, maintain its economic status and give it an economic future.

The council has not always got it right—none of us ever does—but it has tried, and its partnership approach with local businesses and communities has been a substantial success, promoting job retention and creation. It has been criticised by the Tories in Birmingham and nationally at every turn. When the council built the international convention centre, it was described as a waste of money by local Tories—although not by all of them, because some supported it. It was certainly described as such by Tory Ministers, who accused Birmingham city council of squandering money on the centre.

Then what did we find? The most famous use that the centre has had to date on a serious matter was when the Prime Minister took the European summit to Birmingham because that great centre was worth showing off. The centre is smart and modern and has all the necessary facilities to host such an important conference. Not a penny of Government money went into it, and the Prime Minister preened himself and pranced around trying to take credit for it. I think that the centre was used last year for the CBI conference, and it will be used by the CBI again this year.

Lo and behold, among the Tory hypocrites the Tory party central council is to meet there at the end of this month. I wonder whether it will put up on one of those screens which it is so good at using a notice stating, "We condemned this place and the staff, and now we are proud to make use of it."

There have been complaints—they have been made time and again—about the city's efforts to renew the city centre and to make it a smart place of which the people of Birmingham and, indeed, Britain can be proud. It has succeeded. There has been a massive improvement in the city centre. Indeed, the Minister of State, Department of Employment visited the city centre this week and said:

> "No one visiting the City of Birmingham can fail to be impressed by the change and developments in the city centre—surely one of the urban regeneration success stories of recent years."

The hon. Lady was merely following on from what the President of the Board of Trade had said last week, when he endorsed the city's regeneration efforts and held them up as a model of civic activity to promote regeneration.

However, all that the Government do is talk about renovation grants. It is absolutely typical of them—they will the end but do not will the means. They have given people a statutory right to renovation grants, but they have not provided the money to meet that right. The spending on renovation grants in the whole of Britain in 1984 was £1.5 billion; it was down to less than £500 million when

the last annual figures were produced. In 1984, some 214,000 grants were made, but in the last year for which the full figures are available the number had been reduced to just 34,000. Councils have been forced to institute queuing systems. That may not be lawful, but it is the only thing that they can do when they are faced by people with a statutory right but have not been provided with the Government funds to meet that.

In the very last Budget, the Government lopped a further £57 million off the private sector renovation grant scheme. Birmingham was caught in a dilemma not of its or Labour's making but of the Tory Government's making. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), the chairman of the local newspaper group, asked who jumped the queue. The people of Birmingham are not really concerned about who jumped the queue; they are bothered about the people who created the queue in the first place. That needs to be sorted out.

If the city of Birmingham is to discharge its tasks, it faces massive problems in trying to serve almost 1 million people. It needs Government help to provide services. In the Government's list of deprived places in Britain, Birmingham comes 21st. Hon. Members might think that is fair and reasonable, but it should be compared with places that are higher up the list. For example, Westminster is fourth on the list; Kensington and Chelsea is 11th; the City of London—Barings notwithstanding, God help us—is 19th, before the great city of Birmingham. As a result, Birmingham's grant has been cut this year and it has been forced to increase its council tax and cut services. Consequently, the council tax payers of Birmingham, like the council tax payers in most other parts of the country, will be paying more and getting less because of the unfair distribution of grants.

If Birmingham city council had received as much financial help from the Government this year as Westminster received, it would not have had to collect any council tax. Indeed, if it had received the same level of grant as Westminster, it would have paid out an average rebate of £230 to every householder in Birmingham. That shows the unfairness of the system that the Government operate. It is a racket, and the system is rigged in favour of the Government's friends. Of course, the Tories do not regard the people of Birmingham as their friends.

I do not know whether the Secretary of State will roll it out again in his speech, but we are bound to hear the Tories say during the local government elections that Birmingham has a bigger debt than Albania. So it has. Let us compare Birmingham with Albania. Birmingham has better houses than Albania. Birmingham has better schools than Albania. Birmingham has better roads than Albania. Birmingham has better libraries than Albania. The reason for that is that Birmingham has invested in houses, schools, roads and libraries. To do that, and like anyone else, it had to take out a mortgage and then pay it back. That is why Birmingham has debt. The point is that people were prepared to lend money to Birmingham, while no one in his right mind would lend money to Albania. That is what Birmingham has done, and it has done it with the support of the people of Birmingham. Year in, year out, the Labour council has won election after election.

The council previously has been accused of neglecting education. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) spelled out, there have been massive improvements in education in Birmingham, giving priority to educating the children and young people of that great city to give them a chance in life and to give the city in 10, 15 or 20 years' time a chance in Britain and in the world.

I want again to emphasise the unfairness of the distribution system. If Birmingham's education grant had been as big as Westminster's in relation to the population, next year every primary school in Birmingham could have had two extra teachers and every 11-to-18 school could have had 20 extra teachers, without raising a penny on the council tax. That is a further illustration of the unfairness of the system.

I do not have time to spell out all the achievements of the city council. It has its faults—don't we all? However, it is trying hard in difficult circumstances. We have to ask, why are we having this debate? It is part of a concerted attack by the Tories on Birmingham. As I am sure the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield can confirm, there was a meeting last week, to which he was invited by the chairman of the Tory party, to discuss what the Tories could do in their campaign against Birmingham—*[Interruption.]* The Chief Whip was there. We could quote from conversations in the Corridors; people sometimes talk too loudly, and other people listen.

The Tories are launching their local government campaign today and they are starting it, as they did last year, by suggesting that Birmingham and the people of Birmingham are sleazy and are stupid for voting Labour. The fact is that the people of Birmingham know who is good for their city. They have solidly voted Labour for many years, and I am confident that they will do so again. The Tories' attempt to do down the city of Birmingham and its people will backfire. I am convinced that it will rebound on them, just as it did at this time last year.

12.46 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) again revealed his ignorance of how the local government system works, so I shall remind him. The arrangements for grant are worked out by the Government and the Labour-controlled Association of District Councils, the Labour-controlled Association of County Councils, the Labour-controlled association covering the inner-London area and the outer-London area and the Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Councils—none of which says that the system is rigged and none of which agrees with the hon. Gentleman. All of them know the facts; the hon. Gentleman does not. That is the position from which we should start.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) set an example to the House in the way in which he responded to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) in his comments about his constituent. Throughout the current situation, the hon. Gentleman has been extremely careful to make it clear that when he is talking about grave allegations, he means allegations. He has not sought, in any circumstances, to suggest that anyone is guilty until he is so proven.

The House will recognise the distinction between the hon. Gentleman's approach, which throughout has been honourable, and the approach exemplified by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who, I am afraid, fell below even his usual standard in dealing with such a serious issue. The fact is that serious allegations have been made, against a

[Mr. John Gummer]

background in which large sums of money have been put into Birmingham by the Government. On the Stockfield estate, tenants now live in houses owned by their own community association—not run in the appalling way in which Birmingham council had run the estate. The Birmingham Heartlands development corporation is spending £40 million in the inner-city area—the money comes directly from the taxpayer, through Government money, and matched by private money.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: I do not have time to give way.

In Birmingham, Castle Vale housing action trust—HATs were opposed tooth and nail by Labour councils up and down the country—received £100 million in Government money. Altogether, that makes about £400 million. That money is going towards the development of Birmingham, a proud city that is doing a great deal, most of it through partnership and direct Government and taxpayers' money.

I am pleased that, only last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) congratulated Birmingham on that partnership during a visit. The partnership has been made possible by the Government. It was set up in the teeth of opposition from the politically and historically neanderthal Birmingham council, which is supported by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), who is more neanderthal than many.

Increasingly, Birmingham is an improved city where developments are being funded by the taxpayer. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook says that it has done better on education. That happened because the in-coming Labour authority attacked the outgoing Labour authority for not spending any money on education. In the past year and a bit, it has managed to start to make up for Birmingham city council's appalling education policy. The right hon. Gentleman knows that well. Instead of making pompous little remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for—*[Interruption.]*

Dame Jill Knight: Edgbaston. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Opposition spokesman was given a hearing and the Secretary of State should be given the same.

Mr. Gummer: The Opposition spokesman finds it difficult to take any subject seriously because, if he did so, he would have to do some work to find out the facts. He does not like doing that. He does not know that £400 million has gone into Birmingham, or the facts about Birmingham. His knowledge is merely the anecdotal knowledge that leads him to throw allegations at anyone who does not support the Labour party.

I notice that the Labour party's approach to the Birmingham problem is different from its approach to other problems. If I were to speak about Birmingham as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) did when he was doing the job of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, what would I say? I would say that this was

"a case of political corruption and gerrymandering on a scale unknown in modern Britain . . . There is no parallel . . . for corruption on this scale."

I would also say that the Labour party in Birmingham

"is rotten and amoral to the core, and has abandoned the most basic principles of public morality."—[*Official Report*, 13 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 348.]

That is what I would have said if I were the sort of person who takes an allegation and then makes statements as if a court case had been held and a decision made.

The Labour party is entirely selective in the way in which it deals with these matters. I shall treat the allegations in precisely the same way as I have treated allegations against Lambeth, Westminster, Birmingham and the like. Until the district auditor's case has been proved, any Englishman is innocent until he is proved guilty. *[Interruption.]* That is not an unimportant matter. The fact that the Labour party can laugh at the basic principle of British justice shows clearly why the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras does not understand that the House is let down by the sort of speeches that he and the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook have made today.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook did not think that it mattered if funds had been misappropriated because not a lot of money was involved. In his view, it is only a small baby—that is all—and it does not matter because it is not very much. Conservative Members believe that it does matter, however small it is, and whichever party is guilty. If people are guilty, they should be punished; if they are not guilty, they should be presumed innocent. The House's privileges should not be abused by hon. Members, who could be sued if they made some of their comments outside the House.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: I shall not give way.

The problem is that Birmingham city council has much to be modest about, whereas Birmingham has a great deal to be proud of. After all, the council must explain the £2.5 million spent on women's workshops; not many jobs were created with that money. It must explain the £700,000 spent on the council's newspaper, the £3 million wasted on the social services department's computer system and the £1 million given to a trade union resource centre. It must explain that when it complains that there is not enough money for renovation grants, when it says that it does not have the money that it thinks is necessary for a range of goods, and when Opposition Front-Bench spokesman are giggling away. No doubt it does not matter that £1 million went to the trade union resource centre because, in the words of the right hon. Gentleman for Sparkbrook, it is not very much.

The issue is how we should deal with the allegations. I suggest to right hon. and hon. Opposition Members that they would have done their cause more good by taking a large leaf out of the book of the hon. Member for Perry Barr. That would have involved making a clear statement, and then allowing the district auditor to investigate it.

When the district auditor issues his report, I hope that Opposition Members will not assume that what he says means that someone is guilty until the due process of law has been completed. Interestingly, the statement of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras about what the auditor had said about Wandsworth implied that the auditor had said that something illegal had occurred. But the auditor said that the matter may be illegal and may have to be considered in the courts. If the hon. Gentleman cannot distinguish between one and the other when flinging his allegations across the House, he should not

be here. He should recognise the damage that he does to the reputation not only of the House, but of the country for fair play and honesty.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman overran his time, as did the hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff).

The hon. Member for Small Heath is at the centre of the allegations. It would be wrong for anyone to make allegations about the hon. Gentleman, any of his hon. Friends or the people with whom he works without having extremely good evidence. It is much better to put that evidence in front of the suitable authorities rather than the public arena. He might just feel that his attempt to prove his position point by point would have been more successful if he had looked at the matter differently.

In these circumstances, we should do for ourselves precisely what we have done for other people. If the Labour party had approached this matter in the same way as it has approached other matters when it has attacked Conservative-controlled authorities, it would have gone to town today. We would never have seen the like of it before. What is wrong about the approach of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, apart from the consistent smirk, is that he has appalling double standards. In his view, people who have not been proved guilty are guilty if they are Conservatives and entirely innocent if they are socialists; people must not be smeared if they are socialists, but must be accepted as being absolutely guilty if they are Conservatives. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have let down the House by applying a double standard to an incompetent and useless council about which a number of allegations have been made.

The district auditor will investigate those allegations. I hope that, in the meantime, hon. Members of all parties will continue to adopt an even-handed approach and that we shall hear no more unsubstantiated allegations from Opposition Members about a Conservative council. We stand for the principle that one is innocent until proven guilty.

Land Mines

1 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): There is a global land mine—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber please do so quietly?

Mr. Cohen: There is a global land mine crisis—there are 100 million land mines in 62 countries. The United Nations estimates that 800 people die each month from land mine injuries, and 1 million people have been killed or maimed since 1973. Twenty million refugees want to return to their homes, but are impeded by the problem of uncleared mines.

The purpose of land mines is to bring terror to large populations. They have been sown around key economic installations, electricity and water plants, roads and ports, and civilians are the targets. The United States recently reported that the number of land mines deployed increases by between 500,000 and 1 million each year, and that they are increasingly becoming more sophisticated and hard to detect.

The present generation of land mines are plastic, with only a small metal component, which means that they are difficult to detect with metal-seeking devices. The next generation could well be all plastic, and perhaps undetectable. Mines have increasingly sophisticated electrical fuses that are far more hazardous to find and remove, and have associated booby traps, too. By contrast, mine clearance technology has advanced little since the 1940s.

The United Nations reports 84 de-mining experts killed in Kuwait, and at least 30 in Afghanistan. There are terrific complications in clearing mines in Cambodia, Mozambique and Rwanda. In those counties, mines are often planted in long grass or on the tea plantations, which may have to be taken up blade by blade, bush by bush.

Mine clearance is expensive. The Government give about £8 million towards the process, but that is small potatoes when set against the extent of the problem. In Afghanistan, which has 10 million mines, it would cost about $17 million a year for six years just to clear the priority community areas. In Cambodia, there are between 5 million and 7 million mines, and our Government helped train the Khmer Rouge to lay them. In Rwanda, Somalia, Mozambique, Bosnia, the Yemen and the Gulf, millions of mines have been laid and are waiting to explode.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, pointed out that mines had gone from being

"a tactical battlefield weapon to a theatre-wide weapon of mass civilian destruction—a weapon of mass destruction in slow motion."

Land mines need to be treated like chemical weapons, with a total worldwide ban. The United Nations has urged such a ban; the United States instituted a one-year ban or moratorium in October 1992, and extended it in 1993 for an additional three years; the European Parliament passed a resolution in December 1992 demanding a five-year moratorium; and many countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Israel, South Africa, Argentina and Canada, have announced their support for a moratorium. The Government say that they back the UN resolution

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for a moratorium, although the Foreign Office resisted it fiercely in private before accepting it. The Government keep demanding and applying exemptions to it.

The inhumane weapons convention of 1981 has a land mines protocol. We signed up to the convention in 1981, but I am told that we ratified it only three weeks ago. In answer to a parliamentary question on 16 January, the Government said that the motivation for ratification was to be able to take part in the September review conference. The implication is that they do not really support the convention but merely want a place at the table.

We have ratified the convention but only by Executive order, not legislation. Legislation would have made it a specific crime to breach the convention, but the Executive order does not. Only military disciplinary procedures will apply. That is not a good example to set other countries.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) is in his place. He tabled the excellent early-day motion 727, which refers to the petition recently presented to Downing street by the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development. It had millions of signatures, and called for an immediate moratorium on the export of all anti-personnel mines, and for the Government to encourage other Governments to follow suit. What have the Government done to encourage other Governments to follow suit?

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I congratulate the hon. Member on raising this issue on the Floor of the House. He might like to know that 100 hon. Members of all parties have now signed the early-day motion, and that many people share his belief that far more should be done not only to stop the export of component parts from the United Kingdom but to influence those countries which are the quartermasters, which provide the armaments and anti-personnel mines that are doing so much damage and creating major development problems.

There are 30,000 amputees in Cambodia alone who are the direct casualties of land mines, and 1 million people around the world have either died or been injured as a result of coming into contact with anti-personnel mines. Many hon. Members of all parties welcome the hon. Gentleman's initiative.

Mr. Cohen: I am grateful for that intervention, and to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out that this is an all-party matter.

Also on 16 January, the Government said that no manufacturers were currently supplying United Kingdom armed forces with anti-personnel mines, including self-destruct or self-neutralising ones. If, as the Government claim, none has been exported since 1982, the implication is that no United Kingdom manufacturer is currently making complete land mines. Therefore, the Government could ban manufacture and export from this country. Why have they not done so?

In another place on 16 January, Lord Ingelwood said in effect that the moratorium did not include components for land mines and that exports were considered on a case-by-case basis. What has the Minister to say about components? Are we still making and exporting them?

What about work on land mines done by British companies under licence abroad? What about their research work? Oxfam said that the Government referred only to conventional land mines as part of the moratorium. What about non-conventional mines? The Government should be far more open about their policy. What are they covering up? Why will they not support a complete ban on the manufacture and export of such items?

My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) asked a couple of interesting questions about exports. In answer to one, he was told that the Government had established a moratorium on the export of mines that did not have self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms, and that export licenses for components would be considered only in the light of "other established criteria". What are those criteria? The response makes particular reference to the exemption in respect of the self-destruct and self-neutralising mechanisms which the Government have awarded themselves.

In answer to another question about the export of land mines with self-destruct mechanisms, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields was told by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement:

"The UK has declared an indefinite moratorium on the export from the UK of all anti-personnel land mines which do not have self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms."

That means that the moratorium does not apply to the mines that do have such mechanisms. The reply goes on to refer to the Government's efforts in trying to forestall the transfer of anti-personnel mines. The final sentence is especially interesting:

"Any applications for an export licence for a land mine which did possess a self-destruct mechanism would be assessed carefully in the light of these and other factors."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. *445*.]

What other factors? The Minister should answer that. That whole sentence implies that permission may still be given for exports of those components. In fact, permission probably would be given if the mines were to have a self-destruct mechanism.

The Government are wrong in trying to set up an exemption for self-destruct and self-neutralising mines. They have said that such mines do not pose great dangers to civilian populations. They do. They still kill and maim innocent civilians, and are costly and dangerous to remove. Other countries do not talk about exemptions for such mines, so why do this Government?

Oxfam has expressed its concern about the Government trying thAT get-out; for example, it asks how long the Government say such mines should be in the ground. That is worth an answer, because the longer the mines are in the ground, the more dangerous they are.

Oxfam also asks whether the Government have researched the failure rates of self-destruct and self-neutralising mechanisms. I can answer that, because the Government answered my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on that subject on 18 January. The answer was none. They have not conducted any research into failure rates, so their assumptions that such mines are not so dangerous is false. The Government are wrong to have distinguished between types of mines and established an exemption for themselves.

The Government have argued that the British Army should have anti-personnel land mine capability, and that the mines are legitimate defence weapons if used in

accordance with the laws of war—clearly marked when laid, and removed afterwards. Incidentally, the Government have not ratified the 1977 additional protocol to the Geneva convention on the laws of war, and they should have, because it is linked to the inhumane weapons convention.

Most wars these days are not conducted according to those traditional laws of wars. Most conflicts are guerrilla wars or internal wars, such as in Bosnia, where anti-personnel mines are not used in any structured or controlled way. As I have said, they are used to destroy morale and instill terror among civilians.

Indeed, it has been reported that some land mines have even been dropped from the air, which shows the indiscriminate nature of their use. British forces have a whole array of sophisticated weapons at hand if operating abroad—we certainly do not want to deploy land mines in this country under any circumstances. It is worth the British forces abandoning their use of this weapon to stop the terror worldwide.

The Government have been obstructive, as was the case at the recent Copenhagen world summit. I bring to the attention of the House a letter I received—presumably other hon. Members also received it—from the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Bishop of Brentwood, leaders of the Religious Society of Friends, the Salvation Army and other groups. It says:

"The draft document for the Social Summit in Copenhagen includes a paragraph (No. 71) from the Vatican seeking to address the problem of arms with indiscriminate effects, e.g. land mines and laser weapons. Britain has bracketed this paragraph which means we want it removed. Please use your influence to persuade the Government to support the Vatican paragraph, rather than to eliminate it."

From what I hear about that Copenhagen summit, the Government had their way, and the Vatican's proposal was not taken on board. The Minister should explain why the Government took that position.

The land mines protocol of the inhumane weapons convention is acknowledged to be weak. For example, it does not apply to internal conflicts. Instead of trying to strengthen it, the Government are trying to exploit it. They keep saying that mines can be used in accordance with the protocol, and that mines do not pose great dangers to civilian populations. That is poppycock. The Government are also blocking the call for a moratorium and a total export ban.

By dragging their feet, the Government could deem worthless the review conference due to take place in September, in which land mines will be the major subject for debate. We should not wait until September in any case, we need action now, and strong action from Governments such as the British Government, to ensure a moratorium and a total export ban if we are to encourage other Governments and other countries to do the same.

There is a difference between the political parties on this matter. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields, the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, has made it clear that the Labour party has called for the Government to fully support the UN motion on halting the export of anti-personnel mines, including the high-tech varieties with self-destruct mechanisms. Indeed, my hon. Friend assures me of the proposed ban of export of all anti-personnel land mines.

Oxfam has also made recommendations of which the House should be aware. Among them, it recommends at the very least that a ban on the export, transfer or sale of all anti-personnel mines, including those with self-destruct and self-neutralising mechanisms, should be agreed at the final review conference. The inhuman weapons convention should be made applicable to internal conflicts as well and it should be strengthened by an effective system of monitoring and enforcement.

Oxfam says:

"The above recommendations are vital, but the only adequate solution is a total ban on the production, sale and use of anti-personnel mines."

The Government should adopt such a policy and, if they do not, they risk being almost—I hesitate to say it—the Myra Hindley of the international community, if they allow such indiscriminate slaughter of innocent civilians around the world to continue. We do not want that.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Does the hon. Gentleman have the permission of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) to speak?

Mr. Howarth: I hope I have.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Without the permission of the hon. Member for Leyton and the Minister, I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to speak.

1.16 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I apologise for that misunderstanding. Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) wished to speak. We are rather short of time.

Mr. Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davis: I shall give way for one intervention.

Mr. Howarth: I simply want to say that I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) for introducing this subject, and for his cogent and moving speech. I cannot conceive of any sufficient justification for this country continuing to permit the export of anti-personnel mines. I hope very much that, in fact, we shall have an enhanced programme to support the clear-up of these appalling devices. Apart from the humanitarian consideration, how much more in Britain's interest that surely would be than to continue to allow Britain's contribution to the world, even in principle, to be one which allows such destructiveness and suffering to continue.

Mr. Davis: I shall have to move pretty fast to cover the points that I hope to cover.

I too congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on obtaining this debate, and raising this subject. I certainly welcome the opportunity to reply.

The effect of land mines on civilians has rightly become a humanitarian issue of considerable public concern. The Government fully understand the concerns of the hon. Member for Leyton, although I hope that he will forgive me if I do not quite agree with his hyperbole from point to point about the Government's policy.

[Mr. Davis]

As the hon. Gentleman said, the irresponsible use of land mines in recent conflicts, particularly in Africa and Asia, has had terrible consequences for civilians. Those consequences have endured long after the hostilities have ended. Scenes from those countries of awful damage to innocent civilians, often children, have understandably aroused strong emotions. The Government share the widespread abhorrence of those scenes. We share the views expressed by many charities and humanitarian agencies. Indeed, I believe that we share the views of the hon. Member for Leyton that the international community needs to act quickly.

The international community is acting. Contrary to what the hon. Member said, I am pleased to say that the United Kingdom is taking a lead in many areas. We have led the way in proposing and implementing practical and sensible measures which will command wide adherence, and which will therefore do the job for which they are intended—reducing the danger to innocent civilians.

I should like to set out clearly what we have done so far, and what we propose to do in the coming months. In doing so, I hope to respond to the majority of the points raised by the hon. Member for Leyton. My first announcement as a Minister, on 27 July 1994, was an indefinite moratorium on the export of all anti-personnel land mines, other than those equipped with a self-destructing or self-neutralising mechanism. That moratorium covers all countries.

We are often asked—the hon. Member for Leyton raised this point—why it is necessary to confine the moratorium to non-self-destructing mines. The answer is that that, in our view, is the best way to achieve our principal objective, which is to protect civilians. It is not combatants in the heat of battle but civilians who have suffered most from the improper or immoral use of land mines.

The hon. Member for Leyton had a vivid phrase for such weapons. He said that they were weapons which act in slow motion. Civilians are killed or injured when they return home and when they leave their homes to go about their daily business—not just in the days and weeks following a war, but sometimes for years afterwards. It is the mines that were laid earlier but which are still active which lead to most of the terrible pictures that we have all seen, not the use of land mines in the conflict itself.

All land mines can cause injuries to civilians as well as soldiers. However, a smart land mine which self-destructs or is neutralised after a period is then no longer a danger to civilians.

The hon. Member for Leyton raised two issues, with which I want to deal very quickly, in respect of technical standards and research.

Mr. Alton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Davis: I apologise, but I cannot give way. I would have liked to give way, but I am very short of time.

Our experts tell us that, with regard to standards, a failure rate of one in 1,000 is possible. The American experts, dealing with a technology that is well understood, believe that a failure rate of one in 1 million is achievable. Although the hon. Member for Leyton said that there was no research on the matter, as soon as the United Nations weaponry convention reaches a conclusion, and we reach a conclusion on our code of practice, the Ministry of Defence will undertake work to ensure that mines that obtain under the new convention meet those conditions properly.

It would be easy to say, "Ban the export of all land mines." However, the vast majority of countries, including Britain and most other western countries, accept that land mines are a legitimate means of defence, provided that they are used responsibly and in accordance with the laws of war. Frankly, we would not persuade many countries that they should give up land mines altogether.

Even more importantly, a complete ban on the export of land mines by well-meaning western countries would have little effect where it really matters. The conflicts which the hon. Member for Leyton and I have mentioned have largely been in the developing world. Land mines are a cheap weapon. In our view, it is only realistic to recognise that they will continue to be used.

Our aim should be to ensure that existing stocks are replaced as quickly as possible with self-destructing mines. That is not only a logical and realistic approach; in our view, it is the most humanitarian approach. That is why I announced last July a ban on the export of anti-personnel land mines which do not self destruct. It is our policy to support steps that represent realistic and practical progress. Our decisions at each stage reflect that.

I am pleased to be able to announce to the House an extension of the United Kingdom's policy. I am announcing a ban, with immediate effect, on the export of all types of anti-personnel land mines to those countries which have not ratified the United Nations weaponry convention. I can also announce—this relates directly to a point raised by the hon. Member for Leyton—that the United Kingdom's moratorium is now extended to cover a total ban on the export of non-detectable anti-personnel land mines.

That enhanced moratorium underlines our commitment to put an end to the trade in the types of anti-personnel land mines that are the most dangerous to civilians. It adds a further safeguard by confirming our support for a complete ban on non-detectable anti-personnel land mines which are especially difficult, dangerous and expensive to clear, as the hon. Member for Leyton quite rightly pointed out. Above all, it underlines our support for the principle that land mines must be used responsibly. I hope that it shows a principled and sensible example.

We hope that our action will encourage more countries to ratify the UN weaponry convention and abide by its provisions. We hope that others which have not announced moratoriums, and most particularly those countries which produce land mines, will follow that example soon. However, we are not simply making a gesture, as I believe we were accused of doing earlier, important though that is. The United Kingdom was one of the initial signatories to the 1981 UN weaponry convention—the so-called inhumane weapons convention. That convention lays down rules for the responsible use of land mines and certain other weapons.

The hon. Member for Leyton was correct to say that we did not ratify that convention until earlier this year. However, that was a somewhat technical and legal point, because our armed forces have been trained, throughout the period since signature, to abide by the convention. They have abided by it in two wars—the Falklands war and the Gulf war. In the Gulf war, we were dealing with

an adversary who had not even signed the convention, let alone abided by it. Rather more than most countries, we can demonstrate a commitment to the notion of responsible behaviour in warfare.

The weaponry convention is an important landmark in the process of establishing sound laws of war, but it is now 15 years old. It is generally accepted that its provisions need strengthening. The hon. Member for Leyton made that point. The convention will be reviewed at a conference to be held in September. We will be there, as a full state party, and we will be taking a lead.

Our objectives are to strengthen the convention and to persuade more states to ratify and abide by it. When I talk about strengthening the convention, I mean a significant expansion of its coverage; here I come to a point raised by the hon. Gentleman. We want the convention to cover not only international conflicts but civil wars and other internal conflicts. That is vital, because the majority of cases of land mine abuse are not international wars. It is important that the convention should send a signal that the use of land mines in internal conflicts should also be governed by the humanitarian laws of war.

These are important areas in which we are working for the strengthening of the convention. It is important that the convention should set down clear definitions and standards for self-destructing mines, for the reasons that I set out earlier. It should stipulate when and how minefields are to be marked to keep civilians out. It should ensure that minefields are properly mapped, both to assist mine clearance after a conflict and to protect humanitarian agencies. There should also be provision to assist those agencies when working in those areas. Those are provisions which our own armed forces are trained to adhere to strictly.

The convention should ensure that mines are detectable. There is broad agreement on that, and on banning non-detectable anti-personnel mines. We also support the proposal that the convention should introduce international controls on transfers.

Those are our aims for the review conference in September, and we shall continue to work hard to achieve them. That means getting international consensus. There has been good progress in the preparations, but there is still much work to do. We have some persuading to do. We are working with other countries to ensure that the results of the review are the best possible.

We have invested a good deal of effort in the revision of the weaponry convention, but we believe that serious land mine problems should be attacked on several fronts. To that end, last summer we proposed a code of conduct restricting the transfer of land mines. That is intended as a politically binding undertaking, to which states could accede with great formalities, and as a first step towards a more comprehensive programme for the control of land mine transfers. The idea provoked much useful thought and helped to concentrate minds, and others have made their own suggestions.

In addition to close co-ordination with our European allies, we are dealing extremely closely with our American friends on this matter. We aim to take it forward in parallel with the efforts of the weaponry convention—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Mr. Warren Hawksley.

Hayley Green Hospital

1.30 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I thank you for allowing me to raise the important issue of Hayley Green hospital and its proposed closure, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is a very important issue in my constituency. The closure of any hospital is of great importance to Members of Parliament. Before I came to the House, I always believed that, in local government, small—whether in hospitals or schools—can be beautiful. I formed that view from an early age, perhaps because my late father was the chairman of a cottage hospital in Oswestry, which was set up with his help before the last war. Local small hospitals are something that the people are entitled to hope can be retained.

This case is made even worse because Hayley Green hospital is the only hospital in my constituency. Although every Member of Parliament would be worried about a closure, I suggest that the problem would be worse if it involved the closure of their only hospital.

Hayley Green is a very good hospital and, for more than 100 years, has provided useful hospital cover for generations of people in the Halesowen area. The purpose of that cover has changed and the hospital has had different uses. As time goes by, one accepts that changes are necessary, and I shall discuss the possibility that the hospital could, I hope, have a new use, but still in the health sphere.

The fact that the hospital is very popular was demonstrated when, in a very short time, the friends of the hospital received the signatures of 15,000 of my constituents who were calling for it to be kept open. The hospital is pleasant, the staff are very caring and it is set in beautiful grounds near a bus route. It is convenient for people visiting friends and relatives in the hospital.

As well as the massive objections from my constituents, it is interesting to note that, when the community health council was consulted, as the rules require, it formally objected to Dudley health authority's proposals. I suggest that it is the health watchdog to which we should listen.

If I were on the Opposition Benches, I would be saying that the closure was due to Government cuts, and I would be shouting and hollering political suggestions. I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner)—the only Opposition Member present—but that is not the case. In Halesowen, we are paying for the fact that, since 1979, the Government have increased expenditure on health by about 68 per cent. in real terms. The increase in the health budget is causing our problems.

The hospital was full and well used until August last year, and no one locally thought that there was any danger of it being closed. The problem has arisen because of Government investment in the building of a new district general hospital in Sandwell. The opening of that hospital resulted in the withdrawal of patients who had been in Hayley Green but were residents of Sandwell. Naturally, the Sandwell authority has taken them back to their own area. I am sorry to disappoint the Labour party, but this is a case not of cost cutting, but of increased expenditure in the neighbouring authority.

Half the patients at Hayley Green came from the Sandwell area, which is why the hospital had only 50 per cent. occupancy after the new hospital opened in August

[Mr. Warren Hawksley]

last year. I accepted, as did most of my constituents, that something had to be done. One cannot run a hospital on only 50 per cent. occupancy. I, and to a certain extent the health authority, started an appeal to find alternative uses for the hospital site. I ought to explain that it is a green-field site and cannot be sold, as some people have suggested, for use as a supermarket or petrol station. That would not be approved by the local council, which has confirmed its use as a health establishment, and that is how it must remain.

If the hospital is closed, one must assume that patients from my constituency will be moved to one of the Dudley hospitals. Interestingly, during the consultation period, when we heard people's concerns about the proposals, the only supporter of the closure I heard of was a Dudley resident. His reason was that the hospital was too far away, and was very hard to get to by public or private transport because the road system drags one through Merry Hill, which is an area of certain congestion. The public transport system does not easily allow the cross-Dudley route. I suggest that that argument was the greatest argument that we had in Halesowen for retaining the hospital.

When the consultation period started, Dudley said that only 48 local—that is, Halesowen—patients had been in the hospital during the previous year. At the end of the consultation period, as many of my constituents had argued that that figure did not look right, Dudley health authority admitted that the 48 should have been 119, and that the figure was nearly 150 per cent. out. That was not a very good basis for making the original decision to close the hospital.

I appreciate that Dudley health authority's request has gone to the region which, in the view of many of my constituents, merely rubber-stamped it, and that because the community health council objected, the matter is with the Secretary of State. I appreciate that it might well be slightly sub judice as it is in her hands and I do not expect an answer today. I do not expect a yes or a no, but I hope that the Minister will be able to cover a few of my questions in his reply.

During the consultative procedures, quite serious questions have been raised. The first concerns the Dudley hospital trust, which was set up in April 1994 and had been using Hayley Green for its patients. In April 1994, Hayley Green was not surplus to requirements and was still needed as part of its plan. Because the regional health authority's lawyers had not completed the paperwork when the closure was proposed, they are claiming that the property will remain with West Midlands regional health authority.

That is unfair. If the Department could suggest that the capital that would be raised by selling the hospital, if it is sold, or as a result of whatever happens to the site, should be used for the benefit of people in the area, as Hayley Green is an old hospital that was raised by voluntary endeavour, my constituents would feel much better. That would not seem an unreasonable suggestion, as it should have been the capital of the trust when it started up in April last year.

The second question also involves the trust. I accept that this is early days—certainly for trusts in our part of the country—but we had many discussions as to what would happen to the hospital. I have here a leaflet entitled, "Hayley Green Hospital: Need It be Closed?", which advertised a public meeting. I was listed as being present to speak, Dudley health authority sent its chief executive and the trust was invited to send its chairman or chief executive, but it did not do so and took little part in the consultative procedures.

I am concerned that, as a Government, we should persuade trusts to accept a certain amount of responsibility if a hospital closure is proposed because of the withdrawal of purchasing contracts on the site. They should take part in the consultative procedures and look actively for other ways in which the facilities that are being closed could be useful in the health field. I say that deliberately, because the chairman of the health authority—who attended the meeting with the chief executive and myself—felt that many of the questions asked could have been answered very much better by the trust.

My third point is whether the recent case of the 55-year-old Leeds man who complained to the NHS ombudsman has any relevance to this case, and some of my constituents have written to me recently regarding that case. My hon. Friend the Minister stated that some health authorities will now be forced to re-provide withdrawn intensive nursing and other services for the elderly as a result of the ombudsman case. I ask for a reassurance that we shall look again before a decision is made to see whether the local health authority might need the hospital provision to honour that judgment. I hope that that point will be given serious consideration.

My fourth point is that, if the decision is made to close the hospital, the site should be used for health. I have stated that the site would be unlikely to get planning permission for any other purpose. The local league of friends might well consider setting up an old people's home in the form of a trust, and the local social services committee might well be prepared to offer 15 people to put into such a home.

Can my hon. Friend say whether it is appropriate to encourage Dudley health authority to take an interest in what happens to the hospital, and to work with social services and possibly with the league of friends to see whether a trust can be set up? That is a possibility, but nobody will be prepared to give it serious consideration until we know that closure is inevitable.

But if that happens, will it be possible to have such provision on a site designated only for health? West Midlands regional health authority, which obtained the property by unfair means—on the day when the trust was set up, the property was in use—should offer a reasonable lease to Dudley health authority, social services or a trust, so that the site can be used for the elderly.

My fifth point is that I would like to know what is to happen to the proceeds that will be raised if the site is sold. That is important, and I hope that the proceeds will come back into the Dudley area or the west midlands area.

I hope that I have shown that we are realistic in Halesowen. We realise that we have to tackle the problem that has been created by the building of a brand new hospital at Sandwell, but we believe that Halesowen should not suffer to the extent of having no hospital provision at all. We believe that the hospital can and should be saved. If it is not saved, we should look at the possibility of another health-based public service being provided. To do that, we shall need the help and good will

not only of the Department and the Minister, but of West Midlands regional health authority and Dudley health authority.

Even at this late stage, I hope that we can convince the Department that the approval for closure that the West Midlands authority has requested should not be granted. I also hope that the Minister will be able to assure us that the use of the premises in the long term may include health purposes.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) on having the opportunity to initiate this debate, and on the helpful and measured way in which he has done so. Hon. Members who have had small hospitals in their constituencies understand the loyalty and affection that they can engender, and the concerns that are raised when there are question marks over their future.

While my hon. Friend kindly excused me from giving an answer to his main question today—he is right to say that that is not possible—he asked for clarification and answers that might help to reassure people. As he said, if they do not have the facilities that they have now, they would like to ensure that there is good health provision in their area. That is why I am glad to respond to the debate.

As my hon. Friend said, the proposal to close Hayley Green hospital has been contested by the community health council, and it has been referred to the Secretary of State by West Midlands regional health authority. My right hon. Friend has yet to reach a decision on its future.

My hon. Friend will also know that the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS trust, which serves the residents of the borough of Dudley, is divided among five sites. While I appreciate the desire of the residents of Halesowen to retain services at Hayley Green hospital, the proposal that the hospital be closed will be judged on whether it is based on sound clinical and managerial factors, and with the best interests of the residents of the borough of Dudley in mind.

Hayley Green hospital is sited extremely close to the south-eastern boundary of the borough and has traditionally performed several roles, mainly connected with services for elderly people. Those services include rehabilitation for elderly patients with medical conditions, chest medicine for patients with chronic conditions and a 10-place pre-discharge unit for patients getting ready to transfer home following treatment. That amounts to a complement of 47 beds. The hospital serves patients from all over Dudley and occasionally patients from outside the borough.

Last April, the Dudley Group of Hospitals trust had to accept a large reduction in the contract that it had with Sandwell health authority. That was as a direct result of Sandwell Healthcare NHS trust planning to open, and subsequently opening, the new Rowley Regis community hospital in September. It enabled Sandwell health authority to purchase more locally accessible services for its population, removing much of its requirement for services from the Dudley Group of Hospitals. As my hon. Friend said, the problem has been caused by increased Government investment in the health service, which has resulted in new facilities that have affected his constituency.

The Dudley Group of Hospitals, as a self-governing trust, chose to concentrate the impact of the contract change on one site rather than try to spread savings attempts across a variety of sites in the trust. That meant the closure of more than half the beds at Hayley Green hospital, leaving the unit—in its view—unviable and extremely expensive to run. If the Dudley Group of Hospitals was to retain the site with its residual services, I am told that that would entail an additional cost of £180,000 per annum to Dudley health authority. As I am sure my hon. Friend can understand, those are funds that the health authority would prefer to invest in health care for the residents of Dudley, rather than—as the authority sees it—spend them on the maintenance of underused buildings.

As my hon. Friend is aware, Dudley health authority proposed that Hayley Green hospital should be closed and that the services previously purchased from there should be purchased from Corbett hospital, which is a part of the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS trust, and from the newly opened £12 million Rowley Regis community hospital in Sandwell.

I am told that the majority of patients treated at Hayley Green are from outside the Halesowen area, although a not inconsiderable minority are locally based. During the consultation exercise, some of those people from outside Halesowen—it sounds as if my hon. Friend heard from one of them—commented on the travel difficulties they faced in getting to the hospital. That is a serious and important issue locally, and I understand that the proposals acknowledge those concerns. If the proposals were to be approved, Halesowen residents would have the choice of two nearby hospitals, while residents of the rest of Dudley would also benefit from improved access to services.

I am aware that other benefits have been identified, such as those arising from the development of an integrated service at Corbett hospital. The proposals outline a service better supported by a full multidisciplinary team, with on-site medical staffing at all times—facilities that are not available at Hayley Green. It is said that patients would also benefit from safer, speedier transfer to the rehabilitation programme after acute care.

Dudley health authority has also identified net savings of more than £200,000 a year through the removal of services from Hayley Green hospital and their reprovision at Corbett hospital and Rowley Regis community hospital. Those savings come from reduced site costs and through being able to offer alternative services on a more integrated basis, with only small cost increases.

The proposal is to use those savings to improve services for people in need of rehabilitation. My hon. Friend asked about the role of the regional health authority. Capital receipts from the disposal of assets go to the region, and it is for the regional health authority to decide how best to dispose. I am sure that it would wish to take into account the points that my hon. Friend made today, and other points that are made locally between now and any such decision, should it be made. Other revenue savings can be reinvested, and I understand that there are two possible plans. One is to set up a stroke rehabilitation service and the other is to establish a post-discharge support team, to lend home-based support to patients recently discharged from hospital.

[Mr. John Bowis]

I am assured that services at Hayley Green would not be removed until their replacements were up and running. As far as is practicable, patients currently at Hayley Green hospital, and any subsequently transferred there, would have their hospital treatment concluded at that hospital if they so wished.

My hon. Friend raised the concern today that he raised with the chairman of the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS trust, about why the trust was unable to lead in the public consultation exercise. It may be helpful if I point out that procedures must be followed when a significant change of service provision, or closure of a hospital, is being considered. That involves the purchaser—in this case, Dudley health authority—conducting a public consultation explaining the proposals and seeking local views, including those of the community health council.

We would expect local providers, such as the Dudley Group of Hospitals trust, to be fully involved in that process. However, as purchasers are responsible for ensuring effective local health care provision, responsibility for any changes in that provision must fall to them. The effectiveness of the consultation exercise is one of the issues to be considered when the proposals are placed before the Secretary of State.

My hon. Friend mentioned the fact that, two weeks ago, I was involved in issuing clear and practical guidance to health authorities, local authorities and other agencies on NHS responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs. In drawing up that guidance, we looked very carefully at the points raised in the many helpful and thoughtful responses that we received on the draft guidance, which we issued for consultation last summer. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that matter.

The key objectives of the guidance are, first, unambiguously to remind health authorities that it is a fundamental responsibility of the NHS to arrange and fund services to meet people's needs for continuing health care, including, where appropriate, continuing in-patient health care. Secondly, the guidance requires all health authorities to review their current arrangements. Here, I suspect, is my hon. Friend's rub. They should draw up policies and eligibility criteria for continuing health care and, where significant gaps in provision exist, take action to fill them. The guidance offers a further opportunity to strengthen collaboration between health and local authorities.

Thirdly, the guidance sets out a detailed national framework, which all health authorities must reflect in their local arrangements. I hope that that will lead to much greater consistency across the country in how those issues are handled, while preserving an appropriate level of local flexibility to respond to local needs. Fourthly, it reinforces the special care required in making decisions about hospital discharge for frail and vulnerable people who are likely to need continuing intensive support, whether on a long-term or short-term basis, to aid rehabilitation and recovery. Again, that is germane to the points that my hon. Friend raised.

Finally, it encourages greater openness on how decisions about continuing health care are taken. Local policies and eligibility criteria will be subject to public consultation. They will be published with details included in community care charters. From April 1996, patients who consider that eligibility criteria have not been correctly applied in their case will have the right to ask the health authority to review their case.

The need to strengthen local collaboration has been a central feature of the new community care arrangements. We have strengthened the incentives for close working by requiring local authorities, as a precondition to receiving the community care special transitional grant, to facilitate agreement between their social services departments and local health authorities, on the arrangements for hospital discharge.

My hon. Friend is right to raise this matter. In return, I assure him that we shall ensure that the principles within the guidance are fully accounted for before any decision is made on the proposal to close Hayley Green hospital. Indeed, if my hon. Friend studies the guidance carefully, he will see that it contains a fairly clear timetable for the next stages of continuing care provision and that we do not expect any closures to take place, unless they meet the conditions within the guidance, before the review has taken place.

On the broader issue of health care within Dudley, I am sure that my hon. Friend will wish to join me in congratulating the Dudley Group of Hospitals trust on managing to increase its activity levels by 7 per cent. over the past year, while reducing prices by 2 per cent. He referred to many of its achievements. The number of patients seen is formidable. It is forecast that, this year, it will treat 14,500 elective and 24,400 emergency in-patients; 20,600 day cases; 7,700 maternity cases; 46,850 out-patient first attenders; 5,100 day-care attenders; and more than 73,000 accident and emergency attenders.

While work remains to be done, some of the patient charter standards that have been achieved are impressive. No in-patients wait for more than 12 months, and it is expected that the target of no in-patients waiting for more than nine months, set as part of the ambitious West Midlands waiting times initiative, will be achieved by the end of March. There is immediate assessment in accident and emergency, and 30 minutes is the maximum waiting time for urgent cases. In 1994-95, I believe that no operation was cancelled twice, and that all patients whose operations were cancelled on the day of admission were admitted within one month, as required by the new patients charter. That is progress indeed.

I understand that the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS trust has received a SIGMA award—a West Midlands award for quality developments—for its accident and emergency department. The trust is running initiatives to reduce trolley waits and delays in getting X-rays reported by senior doctors. A 20-bed ward designed to provide immediate admission for patients needing urgent medical attention was opened at Russell's Hall hospital last October and a second is due to open this September at Wordsley hospital. Those wards will allow patients to bypass the accident and emergency department and so reduce trolley waits further.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, good health care within Dudley is not restricted to the Dudley group alone. In 1993-94 the Dudley Priority Health NHS trust achieved a five-star rating in five areas of the performance league tables. Last year, the trust opened a new £10.9 million mental health unit. Work was started on a new health facility incorporating a child and family psychiatric unit, which is due to open in July this year, and the trust is working closely with the local community and schools

on the project. Three new mental health units have been established in conjunction with social services in the borough, and a fourth unit is under discussion.

My hon. Friend has a particular interest in the area of Halesowen and I am sure that he will agree that over the past seven years there has been considerable expansion in the range of health facilities available locally. The residents of Halesowen have seen the commissioning of a new health centre, a new community mental health service base and the creation of a 24-place home, primarily for local people with mental health problems. In addition, a new clinic is currently being built on the eastern side of Halesowen, which will provide extensive local services.

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with me that the people of Halesowen and Stourbridge, as well as the rest of the borough of Dudley, are provided with a first-class service of which both patients and staff can be justifiably proud. I thank him for bringing his concerns to my attention. I assure him that they will be given full consideration before any decision is taken, and any decisions will be made in the best interests of the people of Dudley.

Patrick Kane, Sean Kelly and Michael Timmons

2 pm

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): This debate is about a major miscarriage of justice. Three men are in prison in Northern Ireland serving two life sentences each for murders that they did not commit.

It is alleged that Patrick Kane, Sean Kelly and Michael Timmons are guilty of murder because they were present at a violent incident, which occurred at a different location and was perpetrated by two unknown assailants and which culminated in the murder of two army corporals. None of the three men is accused of direct involvement in the murder; none had direct knowledge of the direct perpetrators; none is alleged to have any paramilitary connections, including membership of the Irish Republican Army; and none has a criminal record. They all maintain their innocence.

On 19 March 1988, Corporals David Howes and Derek Wood were murdered by the IRA in Penny lane in Andersonstown in west Belfast. What happened to the two soldiers was extremely brutal, and the nearest thing to the crucifixion of Christ that one could see. Earlier that day, due to the presence of world media, millions of television viewers watched in horror as a crowd in west Belfast set upon the two occupants of a silver Volkswagen that had driven into a large funeral procession. One of the occupants of the car fired a shot, but shortly afterwards the two men were violently hauled from their car, disarmed, taken to Casement park, stripped and savagely beaten.

When their pockets were searched, it became apparent that the two men were soldiers in civilian dress, and they were later identified as Corporals David Howes and Derek Wood. They were subsequently driven in a black taxi to Penny lane about half a mile away, where they were shot dead by the IRA.

Those events took place in a highly charged atmosphere. The funeral into which the soldiers drove was that of Kevin Brady, an IRA man. Mr. Brady, along with two others, was murdered a few days earlier in Milltown cemetery after a gun and grenade attack by a loyalist at the funeral of three unarmed IRA members who were shot dead in Gibraltar by the Special Air Services. No explanation has been given as to why the corporals were present at the funeral procession, nor why the police and the army did nothing to attempt to rescue them.

Those who attended Kevin Brady's funeral were very apprehensive, and genuinely believed that the car contained loyalist gunmen who were hellbent on mass murder. Much of what happened—particularly the final murder—was filmed by an army helicopter, but the two IRA gunmen have never been identified or apprehended. Instead, scores of people were arrested and more than 40 were charged in connection with their activities in and around the stopping of the car and the grievous bodily harm inflicted on the soldiers prior to their being taken away by taxi to be murdered by the IRA.

I am seriously concerned about other cases, but my main focus today is on three of the men who have been found guilty of murder. I believe that a grave miscarriage of justice has taken place. I further believe that Patrick Kane, Sean Kelly and Michael Timmons should be released immediately.

[Dr. Joe Hendron]

All three men were found guilty of murder under the principle of common purpose. It is accepted that none of them had been convicted of the actual murders or was present when the soldiers were murdered. Mr. Justice Carswell ruled that the accused were guilty either because there was a plan to murder the two soldiers and the accused knowingly agreed to and supported the joint enterprise; or, if the purpose of the joint enterprise was not to commit murder, it was foreseeable that a murder might be committed. Given the unpremeditated nature of the incident, there has been no suggestion that there was a preconceived plan to murder the soldiers.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice report commented:

"When considering Kane, Timmons and Kelly it is crucial that their entire alleged involvement lasted only a few minutes."

Therefore, how could it possibly be foreseeable that a murder might be committed?

Patrick Kane was arrested in December 1988 at his home and he was taken to Woodburn police barracks where he was interrogated for several hours. At no time was a solicitor or an appropriate adult—I use that term in the legal sense—present. Later that day, he was charged with grievous bodily harm and false imprisonment. He was allowed out on bail of £150 and two sureties of £300 each. At no time was he remanded in custody—I emphasise that point. He continued working for 14 months while out on bail, and a judge allowed him to go to the Republic of Ireland on holiday as the police had no objection to the trip.

The charge of murder was added in June 1989. Even though charged with murder, Patrick Kane was allowed to stay out on bail until his trial in February 1990. He was found guilty of counselling and procuring the murder of the soldiers, because the judge held that Kane was present at and engaged to a minor extent in the physical beating of the soldiers, and that the accused must have known that murder was one possible outcome of his illegal conduct.

Kane was convicted on the basis of controversial video identification evidence and on confessions that he was alleged to have made to the police following several hours of sustained interrogation. It was clearly established before Patrick Kane's trial that he had the IQ of a 10 or 11-year-old and that he was considerably deaf. Dr. Gisli Hannes Gudjonsson, head of forensic psychology services and clinical psychologist to the Bethlem Royal and Maudsley hospitals, examined Patrick Kane on 18 February 1990 in prison for approximately two hours.

In his report, dated 19 February 1990, he comments that at the beginning of the session Mr. Kane begged not to be asked to read anything. He explained that he was almost completely illiterate and felt very embarrassed by it. He said that he tried very hard to cover up his illiteracy when he was with people he did not know. He did not want the other prisoners to know that he could not read or write and, on occasions, he would pretend to other prisoners that he could read.

In his conclusion, Dr. Gudjonsson commented that Mr. Kane's IQ falls at the bottom 8 to 9 per cent. of the general population. That would give him a mental age of about 11 years. He found that Mr. Kane was almost completely illiterate and that the most striking feature of Mr. Kane's personality was his high anxiety. Dr. Gudjonsson felt that Mr. Kane was clearly a man of nervous disposition who would be at a considerable disadvantage when having to cope with an unfamiliar and demanding situation. When in a situation that he found particularly stressful, Dr. Gudjonsson found that Mr. Kane would be more inclined than the average person to consider only the immediate or short-term consequences of his behaviour.

Patrick Kane has suffered from defective hearing for many years and has attended the ear, nose and throat department of the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast since 1968. A senior consultant at the hospital, Mr. Roy Gibson, prepared a report on 21 February 1990, which was submitted to the court by Patrick's defence lawyers. Mr. Gibson studied Patrick's notes and said that it appeared that Mr. Kane had first attended the Royal Victoria hospital on 25 March 1968. It was recorded in his notes that

"his hearing reserve is so poor that it is not justifiable to operate on him at all".

He had surgery on his right ear in 1989. In the report's conclusion, Mr. Gibson stated:

"Patrick Kane has a moderate hearing loss at low tones and a severe hearing loss at high tones in both ears".

We have evidence from one of the country's leading psychologists that Patrick Kane had the intelligence of an 11-year-old, yet for some mysterious reason Dr. Gudjonsson's report was not made available to the trial judge or to the judges in the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Gibson's reports on Mr. Kane's defective hearing were accepted by the court, but at no time discussed either at the main trial or at the Court of Appeal. Despite his obvious handicaps and the contravention of his rights and natural justice, he had been interviewed five times on the first day of his detention—from 10.30 in the morning until late at night—in the absence of a solicitor or any other appropriate adult, as is provided by law in cases such as his.

He asserts that the statements that he made to the police are false and were made out of fear and confusion. Furthermore, the claim made by the police that he kicked one of the soldiers and escorted a priest, Father Alex Reid, away from the scene of the attack is entirely inconsistent with the video evidence of events. A policeman who interviewed Mr. Kane stated in evidence:

"Had I had any idea that he had a hearing defect, I possibly would have looked for an interpreter."

In the BBC documentary "Rough Justice" Mr. Kane's case was examined in great detail and John Ware, the reporter, concluded that the conviction and life sentence passed on Mr. Kane were perverse. On the programme, Peter Thornton QC agreed that a jury might well have reached a different conclusion from Mr. Justice Carswell who, as a Diplock court judge, was sitting alone.

In the same programme, Mr. John Ware spoke about Father Alex Reid, who had been an independent witness in Casement park. Father Reid did not believe that the soldiers would be murdered; he thought that the danger was not from the IRA, but from people losing their heads. He said that he was holding on to both soldiers and thought that he had things under control. It finally became clear to him that the IRA was taking charge after the men began to be stripped. Mr. Justice Carswell seemed to see the stripping as the benchmark for deciding when there could have been no doubt about the soldiers' fate.

Kane said in his statement that he saw a priest on his knees saying prayers beside one of the persons. He goes on to say that he realised then that something bad was

happening or going to happen and decided that he wanted out. Indeed, the man in the green jacket seen on video and believed by the judge to be Kane is clearly walking towards the gates, avoiding any contact with the crowd around the half-naked soldiers. He stays behind the wall, keeping well way from the action. The green man cannot leave immediately because, as the heli-tele showed, the park gates were closed. While the man in the green jacket is behind the wall, an IRA man dressed in white goes into the crowd and takes Father Reid from someone else and Father Reid is manhandled towards the gates.

The judge's conflicting assessment of Patrick Kane's statement must give further concern. Mr. Justice Carswell accepted as true the written statement that Kane had made to the police, and he also relied on the video evidence to prove that the defendant was someone he claimed not to be. The judge chose to disregard major discrepancies between the video and the written evidence.

At the time of his arrest, Michael Timmons was also charged with murder, grievous bodily harm and false imprisonment. He admitted to having been present in Casement park when the soldiers were beaten. Like the other defendants, he denies that he intended to engage in serious criminal activity, still less in a conspiracy to murder.

Although Mr. Timmons was not accused of direct involvement in the murder of the two soldiers, or even of transporting them to the place where they were murdered by others, he was found guilty of murder. The appeal judges concurred with Mr. Justice Carswell's finding.

Sean Kelly was arrested some 11 months after the murder of the two soldiers. He made a statement to the police giving an account of his movements that day and denied any involvement in the murder or beating of the two men. He then chose to exercise his right to remain silent, both in response to further police questioning and at the trial itself.

Mr. Justice Carswell found inconsistencies between Mr. Kelly's statement to the police and the video evidence, yet he had reservations about accepting the identification of Kelly from the heli-tele film on its own because of the poor quality of the film. Nevertheless, the judge determined that, although the video evidence was uncertain, it, combined with the adverse inference of guilt which he was able to draw from the silence of the accused, gave him sufficient grounds to find as a fact that Sean Kelly was in Casement park and that he was guilty of murder.

There have been other judicial inconsistencies. In another Casement park case, the driver of a black taxi was found guilty by Mr. Justice McDermott of transporting the soldiers to the place of the murders, but he was acquitted of murder.

In a second case, another person who actually confessed that at some point he thought that the soldiers would be killed was acquitted of murder by Mr. Justice McCollum, who claimed that the man did not know what he was saying and that he, the judge, believed that no one could have been thinking so clearly in such a situation.

In its report in 1992, the Committee on the Administration of Justice concluded:

"the attitude of the particular judge hearing the case is sometimes just as important as what the accused did.".

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I thank the hon. Member for giving way, and I am reluctant to interrupt him because of the shortage of time. On his last point, will he take into account the fact that, at the appeal hearing, the appeal judgment stated:

"These contentions by the prosecution as to the legal basis for murder by the appellants as secondary parties were accepted by the defence as correct . . . It was not contended"

by the defence

"that the trial judge had misdirected himself as to the law, or misapplied it.".

In view of that clear statement by the Court of Appeal, will the hon. Gentleman withdraw the aspersions that he has cast on the judgment of the trial judge.

Dr. Hendron: No. I will most certainly not withdraw that. There are gross inconsistencies.

Anyone studying the case—we know it was a horrific slaughter of two soldiers—or reading the transcript of the trial and of what the appeal judge said should watch the "Rough Justice" programme as it showed that there are serious differences in interpretation of the statements, especially that made by Patrick Kane and the evidence on video. That is extremely important.

In conclusion, unlike Paratrooper Lee Clegg, whose case is being reviewed in June this year, Patrick Kane, Michael Timmons and Sean Kelly did not kill anyone. Those three men have not had a fair trial, and most definitely are not guilty of murder. As with the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, we are again seeing a gross miscarriage of justice. I am asking the Secretary of State, through the Minister, to take whatever steps are necessary to have the three men released forthwith.

2.17 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): Before I respond to the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), I should like to congratulate him on his success in securing an Adjournment debate for the second time. The subject is one about which he and many other people both inside and outside the House have a deep and sincere concern.

I welcome the opportunity presented to me to explain to the House my right hon. and learned Friend's role in these cases. The House may find it helpful if, at the outset, I remind him of the Secretary of State's powers to refer a case to the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland. They are the same as those available to the Home Secretary in respect of convictions in England and Wales.

It is not for Ministers to substitute their own assessment of the evidence in any case for that of the courts. Their function, by long-established practice, is to examine whether there is some new evidence or other consideration of substance that has not previously been before the courts and that now appears to cast some doubt on the safety of the conviction. This is the criterion: whether it appears to cast doubt. It is not for Ministers to reach a concluded view on whether a conviction is safe.

I remind the House that, on 30 March 1990, Kane, Timmons and Kelly were convicted of murder, grievous bodily harm and false imprisonment. On 5 July 1991, the Court of Appeal of Northern Ireland upheld their convictions and sentences.

The Secretary of State and I have received many representations regarding the cases of the three men. The representations have in the main, but not exclusively, sought to dispute the deductions made by

[Sir John Wheeler]

the courts based on the evidence that they accepted. When representations have sought to challenge the evidence itself, they have tended to concentrate on the identification of the defendants from the considerable video and film footage that is available. In the case of every representation, the Secretary of State had to satisfy himself as to whether the points argued had or had not already been before the courts.

In addressing the question of identification evidence, the Court of Appeal said:

"In seeking to identify any of the appellants on the films, we reminded ourselves, being all too familiar with the frailties of identification, of the need for caution before reaching any firm conclusion".

The court went on to state, in respect of Patrick Kane:

"Repeated running of the films, concentrated observation of them and comparison with the general appearance of Kane in the park satisfies us that the man seen inside the park dressed in the combination of colours of green anorak, dark trousers and white shoes was undoubtedly Kane."

In respect of Kelly, the court said:

"We looked at the film very many times. We had it played and replayed over at normal and slow speeds. We were satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that Kelly was indeed the figure inside the Park that the prosecution pointed to."

I have also noted the widespread expression of unease concerning the application of the law on common purpose to these cases. I am sure that the House will expect me to comment on that aspect.

The principle of common purpose is not new, and its use is not confined to Northern Ireland or, indeed, to the United Kingdom. Mr. Justice—now Lord Justice—Carswell's written trial judgment provides a detailed account of the law pertaining to common purpose and his application of that law to the defendants; I therefore do not propose to rehearse all the arguments now.

I consider it important, however, for the House to hear Lord Lane's comments, expressed as recently as 1989, which the trial judge quoted in his judgment. Lord Lane said:

"A must be proved to have intended to kill or do serious harm at the time he killed. B may not be present at the killing: he may be a distance away, for example, waiting in the getaway car; he may not know that A has killed; he may have hoped (and probably did) that A would not kill or do serious injury. If, however, as part of their joint plan it was understood between them expressly or tacitly that if necessary one of them would kill or do serious harm as part of their common enterprise, then B is guilty of murder".

In applying the law on common purpose, the court did not contend that Kane, Timmons or Kelly attended the funeral that day with murder in mind. However, the court did consider them to have joined in and given support to a joint enterprise, a foreseeable consequence of which was the eventual murder of the soldiers. It was that finding of fact that was upheld by the Court of Appeal.

The Court of Appeal's comments are also pertinent in relation to the principle of common purpose. It said:

"These contentions by the prosecution as to the legal basis for murder by the appellants as secondary parties were accepted by the defence as correct both before the trial judge and this Court."

The court also stated:

"It was not contended during the hearing of these appeals that the trial judge had misdirected himself as to the law, or misapplied it. The contentions were directed in each case against the Judge's findings of fact and the inferences he drew from them."

In the case of Kane, various representations have pointed to his illiteracy, aural impediment and intellectual limitations, and drawn attention to the fact that an "appropriate adult"—the hon. Gentleman's term—was not provided before and during his questioning by the police. All those aspects have been considered most carefully.

Patrick Kane was arrested in December 1988 under the powers derived from the ordinary criminal law, not emergency legislation. The provisions of the non-statutory "Guide to the Emergency Powers" which relate to the appointment of an "appropriate adult" were not therefore applicable. Similar "appropriate adult" provisions have subsequently been introduced for non-scheduled cases in code "C" of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, but they did not come into operation until 1 January 1990.

Patrick Kane's counsel at trial and on appeal argued that his statements should be treated as inadmissible. The Court of Appeal noted:

"Before the trial judge, his counsel submitted that no weight should be given to his oral statements or the written statement because he was illiterate, of low intellectual ability and had a significant hearing loss. Before this Court his counsel, Miss McDermott QC, went further. She submitted that the trial judge should have ruled all these statements inadmissible on those grounds."

The court concluded:

"This Court sees no reason why the judge should have held his statements either inadmissible or of no weight or lesser weight than they commanded on their face. The allegation of a hearing loss could not have been a relevant factor in the nature of the challenge made. It is clear from the transcript that the case he was making at trial implied that he had heard all the suggestions made to him by the police. Otherwise he could not have agreed with them through fear. Nor do we consider that the other grounds put forward are of any avail. He was at the time of his arrest a man of 31 years. Although he could not read or barely write, he was able to write his signature and the words 'No complaints'. But much more so, any detailed reading of the transcript of his evidence, particularly the searching cross-examination by Mr. Foote, shows that he had a ready capacity at all times to understand the purport of the questions put and at times to anticipate and evade what might have been incriminating."

It is clear that the question of Kane's intellectual abilities was very fully argued by his counsel and duly considered by the court. Those aspects therefore do not constitute new material on the basis of which my right hon. and learned Friend could properly ask the Court of Appeal to reconsider his case.

We have also been aware of suggestions of judicial inconsistency between this case and others. It must, however, be borne in mind that judges are duty bound to assess each case on its own circumstances—even when several cases arise from a common incident—and weigh the evidence separately: both the persuasiveness of the prosecution case and the credibility of the accused's defence. The fact that different outcomes may be pointed to does not of itself mean that a particular conviction is unsafe or a sentence wrong.

As I said, the Secretary of State has given the utmost thought to all the representations received before today, and has concluded that in respect of all three men the criterion for a referral to the Court of Appeal of Northern Ireland has not been fulfilled.

At this point it may be timely to remind right hon. and hon. Members that the Criminal Appeal Bill was approved without a Division on Second Reading in the House on 6 March. A number of hon. Members welcomed its extension to Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State's decision to seek to have the Bill extended to Northern Ireland followed a wide-ranging consultation process. The new independent body will investigate miscarriages of justice and when necessary refer them to the Court of Appeal for review.

I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's speech today. I wish to assure him and the House that the Secretary of State's mind remains open and that he is willing to consider most carefully any further material put to him, pending the establishment of the new Criminal Cases Review Commission.

It being half past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Out-of-town Shopping Developments

1. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the precise wording of the new guidance for planning powers relating to out-of-town shopping developments will be published.

5. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the wording of the new guidance for planning powers relating to out-of-town shopping developments will be published.

11. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the precise wording of the new guidance for planning powers relating to out-of-town shopping developments will be published.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): I hope to publish a draft of revised guidance on town centres and retailing for consultation before the summer recess.

Mr. Cunningham: Is the Secretary of State aware of the concern among small shopkeepers serving my constituency about the possible effects of out-of-town shopping?

Mr. Gummer: It is precisely for that and other reasons that I have brought in the planning guidance that has sought to reinvigorate our city and town centres and to increase the amount of mixed use, so that people can live, work, worship, shop and do many other things together in city centres, instead of relying on the motor car.

Mr. Dowd: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, although the issue tends to concentrate on green-field sites outside relatively provincial towns, inner-urban areas whose developments will be on brown-field sites close to traditional ribbon high streets also present an issue? Will the guidance have anything to say about its impact?

Mr. Gummer: Of course it will be necessary to see that new development enhances the town centre, especially the shopping centre. Each case is different. Most of us, looking at Lewisham, would say that a number of serious development mistakes were made in the past. One has to try to provide the best answers within the framework that we shall lay down.

Mr. Bayley: Does the Minister accept that irreparable and irreversible damage has been done to many town centres by out-of-town developments, and that small businesses in constituencies such as mine have suffered at the expense of large businesses, which have been allowed to develop out of town? Does that not show that the unrestricted free market principles behind out-of-town developments have damaged many small, long-established businesses?

Mr. Gummer: That is a very odd question. The fact is that the centres of our cities have been run down, largely by appalling planning decisions taken by local Labour councils. We know who the people who have destroyed our cities are: Labour councillors who hate small businesses and who, when they controlled the business rates, pushed them up so that more and more small businesses were driven to the wall. It is to repair that damage that I am spending a great deal of public money to redevelop our city centres for the benefit of all our people.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I thank my right hon. Friend for what he has done so far, but does he accept that there have been two sad developments in recent years, and not just in Labour areas? One has been the decline of the small specialist shop; the other has been the sucking of life out of the centres of many towns and cities. It is therefore important to try to redress the balance.

Mr. Gummer: I think that the old saying, "Don't use it, lose it," is sensible in respect of shopping. The out-of-town shopping centre has provided an important tradition which many people want. It is a question of striking a balance. It is universally true that, in the city centres that the Labour party has controlled, decline and degradation have been the results of its period of office. Only now are we beginning, with taxpayers' money, to rejuvenate our city centres as I have described.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that traders in the centre of Lichfield are heartened by today's news that retail sales are at their highest for more than 12 months? Is he further aware that retail sales will be enhanced by the fact that unemployment is the lowest it has been in three years?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the increasingly good economic news will be welcomed by those who want to expand their businesses. I want those businesses to expand in the centres of our cities and market towns, so that we can return to the vibrant communities which are so much a mark of Conservative communities and so much abhorred by the Labour party.

Mr. Merchant: Will my right hon. Friend consider in particular the problems caused by traffic and parking where so-called out-of-town development occurs on brown-field sites of the sort mentioned by the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd)? His constituents and mine are affected by a major development at Bell green, Lewisham that poses the danger of having such an impact. I compliment the hon. Member for Lewisham, West on the assiduity with which he has pursued the concerns of his constituents and mine. Wider issues are at stake, and perhaps my right hon. Friend will examine them.

Mr. Gummer: I cannot comment on the particular example that my hon. Friend mentioned, but it is essential to ensure that proper provision for cars and parking is made in city centre developments. I want people to be able to choose whether to use a car to shop.

Mr. Vaz: Every time the Secretary of State speaks on this issue in the House, he leaves Government policy in utter confusion. Will the right hon. Gentleman simply tell the House whether he is in favour of out-of-town developments or against them? If he is in favour, how will he halt the decline of our town and city centres? If he is against, how will he ensure proper investment in town centre management? Is this just another two-faced policy from a two-faced Government?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has been lauded in the newspapers as a reasonable and polite person, but he is being neither on this occasion. He knows perfectly well

that he can like both apples and pears but need not say that he dislikes either of them. Out-of-town shopping development has been necessary and needed, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman is saying to his constituents that they may not shop at a superstore. We need to get the balance right. It has moved too much to the out-of-town shopping centre, and I want to move it back to the city centre. Most people, but not the hon. Gentleman, view that as a balanced and sensible policy. The trouble with Labour is that it goes to extremes on everything—even shopping.

Business Rates

2. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the increase in business rates in Waltham Forest and Redbridge following the recent revaluation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): Rateable values in Redbridge and Waltham Forest have increased 28 per cent. and 25 per cent. respectively. Transitional arrangements will restrict the average increase in bills in the next financial year to 7 per cent. in both districts.

Mr. Cohen: The Minister referred to the huge increases in business rateable values in those districts under the current revaluation, whereas those for the rest of London have fallen. Why is my part of east London singled out for unfair treatment? Businesses are already struggling to survive the recession, without having an added unjust burden. Now that the Minister is in control of business rates, why does he not personally intervene to stop my local firms being driven to the wall?

Mr. Jones: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, valuations are independently made by valuation offices. Of course he is right to say that inner-London rateable values have fallen. They have risen in outer London, but not as much as in Waltham Forest and Redbridge. I strongly suggest that the hon. Gentleman and his constituents contact the local valuation office and provide evidence to challenge any valuation thought to be inaccurate.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that a nationwide uniform business rate is greatly to the advantage of businesses? Does he recall the days when high business rates imposed by Labour authorities drove firms into bankruptcy and pushed many people out of jobs?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is correct. Nationwide, the Government are taking no more in real terms from businesses than in the previous year, because we are committed to increasing the take only in line with inflation. In the old days, some local authorities used to raid businesses to finance grandiose schemes, which was deplorable. They were, of course, Labour authorities.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is it not a fact that businesses increasingly know that it is this loony right Government who are putting up business costs? Is it not true that, in places such as Waltham Forest, Redbridge and the north of England, businesses blame the Government for increasing their costs, and that when firms go to the wall the Government are responsible? Why does the Minister not apologise for the nationalisation of the business rate?

Mr. Jones: Fortunately, businesses are a great deal more sensible than the hon. Gentleman and they know full well that what the Government are taking is restricted to level terms finance. We have to face the fact that valuations will vary from area to area. An appeals system is built in so that people can challenge the rateable values that have been attributed to their businesses.

Objective 1 Funding

3. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made in the utilisation of objective 1 funding on Merseyside; what representations he has received in respect of the participation of local authority and social partners on the committees monitoring the use of objective 1 funds; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Last November, approvals in principle for almost 800 projects, worth over £175 million, were announced, and 742 schemes have now received formal approval. The local authorities are fully involved in the committees monitoring the use of objective 1 funds, as are a range of other partners.

Mr. Wareing: I notice that the Minister did not answer the part of my question about the representation of social partners in objective 1 funding. I believe that he was told by Mrs. Wulf-Mathies, the Commissioner, as early as last November that social partners should be represented. According to an answer in the European Parliament, representations were made. Is the Minister aware that there is considerable enthusiasm on Merseyside for objective 1 status? People there are keen to get on with the work of the schemes, but they are thwarted by the inadequacy of the secretariat and by bureaucracy on Merseyside. If the Minister does not pull his finger out, Merseyside stands to lose.

Madam Speaker: Order. We shall not make any progress at all today if we have Adjournment debates instead of questions. Perhaps the Minister can answer briskly and questions can be to the point.

Mr. Curry: The Commission has accepted that the social partners are not represented. I accept that we need to get the next round dealt with more quickly; but, with 1,500 applications, there is a great deal of work to be done in the cumbersome scheme that we have to operate.

Mr. Alton: Is the Minister aware that, of the 106 applications in the past 12 months, only six have been agreed and that the process is in danger of silting up? Is there not a good case for appointing one person to take control of objective 1 bids to ensure that the programme works effectively?

Mr. Curry: The machinery is cumbersome, but it is imposed by the objective 1 mechanism which we cannot vary or short circuit. On capital projects, 42 regional fund bids have been approved. The social fund training schemes have been done quite quickly; another 25 should come in the next couple of weeks, and 30 had to go back for further work because they were not put together well

enough. We hope to bring those forward as soon as we can and we shall try to speed up the processing of the 1995 round bids. However, as I have said, there are 1,500 of them and it is necessarily a difficult process. We shall do our best.

Training

4. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many training places have been created through regeneration policies since April 1992.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): My Department's regeneration programmes have created more than 270,000 training places over this period.

Ms Hodge: At the peak of the last economic boom, there were desperate skill shortages in London, but 200,000 people were registered as unemployed. Does the Minister agree that the single regeneration budget guidelines should be reviewed to give training greater priority so that, if there is another economic boom, the crisis of no jobs will not be replaced by a crisis of no skills?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Lady obviously does not understand that the SRB is a partnership with local authorities and others. *[Interruption.]* She obviously understands more about urban degeneration than about urban regeneration. When she wore her previous hat, Islington in the 1980s was the seventh worst council of all the English local authorities in the index of local conditions; today it is the fourth worst.

Mrs. Angela Knight: Will my hon. Friend confirm that one of the basic criteria for single generation bids was the creation of jobs? When the second round is considered, will he undertake to give priority to areas such as Erewash which were unsuccessful in the first round?

Sir Paul Beresford: I accept and understand my hon. Friend's concern for her area. I hope that she will help to ensure that its bid is more competitive. Through the process since 1992 or in the pipeline, some 340,000 jobs have been either created or safeguarded.

Contaminated Land

6. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of whether the liabilities for cleaning up contaminated land are too onerous for developers to carry out; and what is the effect on revitalising urban redevelopment.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Robert Atkins): We have carried out a review of responsibilities for dealing with land contamination in which we consulted with a large number of landowners, developers, investors and others. One of the key objectives was to ensure that land was brought back into beneficial use. Our suitable-for-use policy requires action to clean up land only where contamination poses unacceptable actual or potential threats to health or the environment and where there are appropriate and cost-effective means so to do.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that there must be a balance between the private and the public sectors in the costs of cleaning up contaminated land? Therefore, should not the suitable-for-use principle be upheld and the Environment Bill amended to incorporate the common law provisions that have existed in this country for centuries? Should not the conveyancing system be modernised so that it is perfectly clear to all those who might buy potentially contaminated sites what their obligations will be under the new Bill?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend knows a great deal about this subject and I am sure that he will contribute substantially to the discussions on the Bill when it comes to the House from the other place. I assure him that his considerations and those of others with like concerns will be taken into great account when the Bill is discussed.

Mr. Dafis: Is the Minister aware that a Welsh Office report has shown that there are 76 former gasworks sites in Wales where the land is seriously contaminated, including one site in my constituency? The local authority is finding it difficult to obtain any information on that matter. Will the Government agree to an amendment to the Gas Bill to enable information to be made available to the public about the level of contamination on former gas works sites? Could that not be achieved by making it a condition of the licence under the Gas Bill?

Mr. Atkins: There is quite a lot of gas production in Wales, of which the hon. Gentleman is a classic example. It is a matter for the Welsh Office, and I shall ensure that it is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's points.

Ms Ruddock *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: This will be good.

Ms Ruddock: Yes, this will be good.

In his reply, the Minister said that there was a definition of actual harm. He clearly does not know that his colleagues in the other place have already amended the Government's Bill and introduced the qualification "significant". Is it not true that the Government do not know what to do about contaminated land and are having to choose between trying to don the green mantle and obliging their friends in the City?

Mr. Atkins: The trouble with the hon. Lady and the Labour Front Bench on this issue is that they are determined to ensure that industry—which is part and parcel of the problems of contamination and, equally, will be one of those that have to pay for it—has no part to play in the whole issue. We believe that it does and that balance is essential. When the Bill comes to the House, I am sure that the hon. Lady will be able to examine it in as much detail as she wants—and we will have every answer.

Standard Spending Assessments

7. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to change the methodology for calculating standard spending assessments for 1996-97.

Mr. Curry: I announced my programme for SSA changes during the debate on local government finance in the House on 1 February, at which the hon. Gentleman was present.

Mr. Rendel: In the discussions that the Minister expects to have this year, will he take account of the

growing discrepancy between the amount of interest on balances which is assumed in the formula and the actual amount raised?

Mr. Curry: The principle of notionality is at the heart of the system. We are trying to ensure that, over local government as a whole, we reflect what happens across the board. When it comes to individual councils, if we move to a system in which the SSA formula is there simply to reflect the actual spending patterns of councils, we will get some very grave distortions and unfairnesses. I am willing to examine all aspects of the SSA, within reason, and I shall certainly look at the point that the hon. Gentleman raised. However, he will understand that there is a basic principle and that, if we actually started to track individual spending, there would be serious problems in trying to run an objective system.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Is my hon. Friend aware that the concept of area cost adjustment continues to cause great heartache among shire counties, not least Hereford and Worcester? Will he join the local authority associations in reviewing the methodology so that a more sensible, transparent and apparently fair mechanism can be worked out to solve the problem?

Mr. Curry: We have already discussed with the local authority associations a research programme that would consider whether we could move towards a travel-to-work concept in assessing overall employment costs. I have said to the Association of County Councils that, if it can develop its suggestions into a practical alternative methodology, I shall examine that, along with whatever other ideas come forward to deal with the matter.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister accept that, whatever changes he may make in the methodology, if the Government continue to assume, for the purpose of calculations, that Westminster is the fourth most deprived place in Britain, the system will be rigged to the advantage of Westminster? If virtually every other local authority received the same Government support as Westminster, those authorities would not need to collect any council tax; they would go around paying out rebates.

Mr. Curry: It is about time that the hon. Gentleman visited Westminster. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps he should visit the bits of Westminster that he does not customarily visit. Yesterday, I received a delegation from Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster in relation to their bids for the urban programme to aid severely deprived parts of those boroughs. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the 100 yards around Palace green represent Westminster, that shows that he knows damn little about local government.

River Thames

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of how those parts of London adjacent to the Thames can be more effectively utilised.

Mr. Gummer: My Department has recently undertaken a Thames strategy study and has produced a planning framework for the Thames gateway, both of which directly deal with the issue and make recommendations to ensure that land use planning by riparian authorities takes full account of the special character of the river.

Mr. Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Thames in London is a priceless national asset that is disappointingly and significantly underused? Does he further agree that two of the keys to unlocking that problem are access to the river and attractions beside the river? In the second context, is it not encouraging that Bankside power station is to be taken over by the Tate gallery and that the new Globe theatre is nearing completion?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with my hon. Friend about those last examples. I have considered carefully not only the planning guidance that we should give for the Thames but the nature of the Thames beyond the old Greater London council boundary to the sea. We have some proposals and I hope that he agrees that it is important to have wider public consultation. That is why I recently called in the proposals for a new building on the site near Battersea old church.

Mr. Tony Banks: If we are talking about power stations by the Thames, what about Battersea power station? It is one of most horrific sights in London in terms of the fact that it has been allowed to become derelict. The roof is off and a grave danger exists that the building will collapse; I suspect that that is precisely what the owners want. Will the Secretary of State take urgent action to do something about one of the great landmark buildings of London?

Mr. Gummer: I am not sure that I would go quite as far as the hon. Gentleman in his love of Battersea power station, but I recognise that many people are keen on that building. He will be happy to know that the relatively recent inspection showed that the building's structure is being properly looked after. We need to find a proper use for the building and to have the money to develop it. We would all like to know about it if the hon. Gentleman has a use into which he is prepared to put his money.

Planning Policy Guidance 13

9. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to take forward the advice issued in planning policy guidance note 13.

Mr. Gummer: I shall publish shortly a guide to good practice on PPG13, which relates to transport. My Department is funding research into the implementation of that guidance.

Mr. Lidington: Dos my right hon. Friend agree that central Government and local authorities need to treat land use planning and transport planning as two halves of a whole and not as discrete, separate entities if we are to strike the right balance between the interests of those who use cars and those who do not?

Mr. Gummer: That has been particularly shown in the establishment of Government offices which has brought together the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport, and the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Employment. These matters are now seen in a holistic way, which means that we can produce a much more sensible answer. We need an answer that strikes a balance between the use of motor

cars and the traffic that such use produces. We do not want to follow the path outlined by the Opposition, who are opposed to the motor car. We need to be a party that makes the motor car our servant, not our master.

Housing Policy

10. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the Government's plans for reviews of housing policy in the areas of (a) obligations and rights of leaseholders who have acquired their homes under the right-to-buy legislation, (b) local authority housing, (c) housing associations and (d) housing co-operatives.

Mr. Curry: We keep our housing policy under continuous review.

Mr. Hughes: That is a really helpful answer. If it is the case, will the Minister be a bit more explicit about when he will publish his proposals on the review of the right-to-buy legislation and its working for people who bought their homes from local authorities? A study is being undertaken, but he knows that many people are now trapped—they are unable to sell and unable to move and have extremely high service or capital charges. It is not a dream; it has turned out to be a nightmare. When will the Government introduce proposals to make the right to buy a realistic opportunity for the many who took up the option?

Mr. Curry: There are no plans to revise the right-to-buy legislation. Some 45,000 people a year are still moving from social housing to owner-occupation under the right-to-buy proposals, but I think that the hon. Gentleman was referring more particularly to leaseholders who bought their properties. I recognise that there is a specific problem. Up to now, we have consulted on three elements. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is familiar with the good practice guide, with the rules governing mortgage indemnity offered by local authorities and an exchange sales scheme. We are looking to see whether we need to develop that package to deal with what I accept is a real problem for a number of people, although perhaps not for thousands, as is sometimes claimed. I accept that some people have a real difficulty, and we are anxious to find a way through for them.

Mr. Dunn: When my hon. Friend reviews housing policy, will be consider what steps he can take to bring pressure to bear on the local authorities that have the worst record in terms of rent collection and poor management of housing stock and the largest number of empty units of accommodation, and that are largely Labour-controlled?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right. The basic management skills—making sure that one does not have voids and that rent and taxes are collected—are all part of raising legitimate funds to be spent on services, something that local government should never forget is its prime and essential function.

Mr. Raynsford: Why does the Minister not recognise the disastrous impact of current Government policies on almost every aspect of housing? Will he acknowledge that his Department published figures this week showing that the output of new private homes is down by 11 per cent., that new council and housing association starts are down by 31 per cent. and that, on current trends, the output of new rented homes this year will be down to 20,000, the worst figures for any year since the end of the second world war? When will the Government recognise that their policies have failed the nation and need to be revised comprehensively?

Mr. Curry: It is just not true. The hon. Gentleman should examine what is happening. He will see, for example, major growth in the role played by housing associations in the past 10 years and that tenure has been diversified away from local authorities, although he wants to lodge all housing construction with the local authorities again. He will also see that there have been major advances with the right to buy, which is creating a new generation of owner-occupiers.

The hon. Gentleman will see that housing policy has moved on from the grey monolithic policy which was espoused by the Labour party and to which it would want to return; we now have more diversification, with the private rented sector playing its part. He will find that Conservative housing policies are more effective, more diversified and deliver more choice to people and responsibility than the grey uniformity which is Labour's hallmark.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Is the Minister aware that senior citizens in Northern Ireland are not permitted to buy their Housing Executive bungalows, although those bungalows may be in areas of very low demand?

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. I shall examine the point that he makes and get in touch with him.

Pollution (Iver)

12. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in the last year from (a) hon. Members and (b) other bodies in respect of environmental pollution caused by industrial activities on the Buckinghamshire side of the River Colne at Iver with particular reference to the West Drayton area of the London borough of Hillingdon.

Mr. Atkins: Sixteen letters of objection were received concerning the planning enforcement appeals by A M Talbot Limited relating to the use of land at railway sidings in Thorney Mill road for the recycling of coated roadstone, including letters from my hon. Friend and from my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith).

Mr. Shersby: Will my hon. Friend now go further and ask Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to examine alleged atmospheric pollution caused by diesel engines on that site, which is greatly distressing my constituents on the West Drayton side of the River Colne?

Mr. Atkins: I know how concerned my hon. Friend and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield have been to fight the corner for their constituents. I shall certainly ask Mer Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to have a look at the site and see—without prejudice to the result, of course—what may or may not be done to assist.

Housing (Right to Buy)

14. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes have been sold under right-to-buy legislation.

Mr. Gummer: In England, more than 1.23 million homes have been sold under the right to buy. The figure for Great Britain as a whole is more than 1.5 million.

Mr. Knapman: That is excellent news. Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that housing is more affordable than it has been for some years, and seek to promote opportunities for tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of people to join the property-owning democracy, for their benefit and for ours?

Mr. Gummer: The situation is improving considerably. We are now selling houses under the right-to-buy scheme or similar schemes to the tune of 60,000 per year. That means, of course, that those people are choosing to buy their homes knowing that the Labour party would have stopped them. That is the distinction between the parties.

Mr. Fraser: Will the Secretary of State pay tribute to the splendid way in which housing associations have reinvested the proceeds of houses sold under the right to buy? Why does he not let local authorities do the same?

Mr. Gummer: The right-to-buy system does not work in that way for housing associations—only if they have carried the right to buy on from the local authorities, as the hon. Gentleman no doubt knows on reflection. We allow local authorities to reinvest the money, but we also ask them to pay off the mortgages that they have incurred to build the houses in the first place.

Dr. Twinn: I thank my hon. Friend for his continuing and enthusiastic support for the right to buy. I also thank him for listening to the great concerns of right-to-buy leaseholders in Enfield and Edmonton, who enthusiastically grasped the opportunity to buy, but now find themselves stuck in properties with structural damage which was not disclosed to them when they bought the houses. It is a reasonably small number of people, but they deserve our urgent help. Will the Secretary of State give me an answer?

Mr. Gummer: I praise my hon. Friend for leading the campaign of this relatively small but important group of people who have those particular problems. He knows that I am looking at them very carefully.

Housing Association Rents

15. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent for new lettings by housing associations; and what was the equivalent figure for 1989.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The average rent for housing association lettings made in the third quarter of 1994 was £45.63. The equivalent figure for the calendar year 1989 was £23.64.

Mr. Khabra: Does the Minister agree that the doubling of rent has been caused by the Government's deliberate policy of reducing the rate of grant to housing associations, which has fallen from 75 per cent. in 1989 to 62 per cent. today? Will he consider giving more grant to the housing associations so that the rise in rents stop and more people can be given homes in housing association property?

Mr. Jones: As I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a trade-off between grant rates and volumes. Reducing the grant rate has, of course, resulted in 10,000 more lettings being made available. Of course the hon. Gentleman is right that the grant rate must be kept under review. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) made exactly that point as Minister for Housing and Planning when he answered questions before the Environment Select Committee on the subject some considerable time ago.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my hon. Friend remind the House of the enormous benefits to be gained from the wholesale transfer of housing stock to housing associations, which can mean far better management, a reduction in local authority debt, lower council taxes as a result, and far better conditions for those tenants whose houses are transferred?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to what has happened as a result of large scale voluntary transfers. It is not only a question of benefits for the local authority and for the tenants. Additional building has also been possible as a result of LSVT housing associations. They have also been able to bring forward their capital improvement programmes. It is very much a win-win situation.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that the private sector is looking increasingly warily at investing in housing association stock because rent levels are now so high that people can obtain those properties only if they can get full housing benefit? Does the Minister accept that the situation is now unacceptable and that we must do something more to ensure that units are offered at affordable rents?

Mr. Jones: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I spend much time discussing these matters with the lenders. We have found a continuing enthusiasm on their part for lending to housing associations, which they see as a solid investment.

Homelessness

16. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress on the problem of homelessness in Greater London.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The number of households accepted by London local authorities as statutorily homeless continues to fall. Last year 9.9 per cent. fewer households were accepted than in 1993, which is 24 per cent. below the 1992 level. In central London, the Government's £182 million rough sleepers initiative has reduced the number of people sleeping rough by three quarters.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent news. Will he join me in congratulating the voluntary agencies which work so closely with his

Department? They have the experience, expertise and knowledge, and they know very well that there is no reason for anyone to sleep rough on the streets of London.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have no problem in joining her in paying tribute to the voluntary agencies. They do a very good job in respect of rough sleeping and in respect of preventing homelessness elsewhere. However, it is also only fair to pay tribute to the many local authorities which have put a great deal of effort into preventing homelessness, as opposed to dealing with the problem once it arises.

Mr. Gerrard: I welcome the fall in the homelessness figures, but what effect does the Minister expect to see in respect of next year's figures as a result of the cuts in income support for mortgage payers and the caps on housing benefit? Would the Minister like to predict what effect that will have on next year's figures?

Mr. Jones: As local authorities appreciate the importance of preventive action, I certainly expect that to feed through in terms of the homelessness figures. As the rough sleepers initiative has gathered pace, and as we have managed to house those people who are willing to be housed, the problem will come down to a hard core of those who, because of drugs, mental illness or drink problems, are perhaps unwilling to be housed—unless one opts for enforced action, which raises a number of moral issues.

Mr. Hendry: Will my hon. Friend ensure that the most recent figures, which show a drop in the homelessness numbers, are sent to organisations such as Shelter? Does he not find it slightly strange that such organisations issue press releases whenever the figures are worse but have been strangely silent over the past two years while the figures have been improving?

Mr. Jones: That is reflected in the fact that Opposition Front-Bench Members' welcome for the splendid figures has also been conspicuously absent.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority

17. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about capping criteria for the Tyne and Wear fire and civil defence authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have received a number of representations about the provisional capping criteria as they affect the Tyne and Wear fire and civil defence authority.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Minister aware that Tyne and Wear fire and civil defence authority has lost about £540,000, and Manchester more than £1 million, as a result of bungling by the Department in setting the capping criteria? What steps is the Minister taking to repair the damage and to avoid any repeat of that situation next year?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will know that, once a budget has been set, an authority cannot revise it upwards unless some legal point went wrong in the calculation. Having set the budget, authorities are able by definition to discharge their statutory responsibilities within it. I am considering the criteria for next year and will consider the point that he is making about the amount by which the Tyne and Wear authority might have raised its budget, had it set it later.

Mr. O'Hara: Is the Minister aware of the danger that, because of the cap imposed by his Department on its budget, the Tyne and Wear authority might not be able to fulfil its statutory obligations under law—as laid on it by the Home Secretary—as is already the case on Merseyside?

Mr. Curry: If a local authority sets a budget within the cap, we must assume that it can discharge its statutory responsibilities. Local authorities can set a budget above the cap and tell the Government why that is necessary to discharge their responsibilities satisfactorily. A number of authorities have taken that course of action, but it was not one pursued by Tyne and Wear or Merseyside authorities.

Royal Docks, London

18. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution he intends to make to the development of London's royal docks.

Sir Paul Beresford: Through the London Docklands development corporation, we have invested about £400 million in major infrastructure works in the royal docks. That has triggered a number of innovative and exciting private finance initiative regeneration projects—particularly the urban village, the proposed exhibition centre and the combined heat and power energy company. All have the potential to make a major contribution to east London's economy.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is my hon. Friend aware of the disappointment at the decision not to allocate funding from the single regeneration budget for the royals university college. That and the proposals for a new international exhibition centre represent a major opportunity to regenerate east London as a whole in the way that he described. As the royals already have excellent access by road, light rail and air, through London city airport, will my hon. Friend undertake to continue the Government's role as a catalyst in realising the full commercial, academic and employment potential of the royal docks?

Sir Paul Beresford: I can reassure my hon. Friend. As I understand it, although the royal docks missed this year's single regeneration budget bid they intend to bid again next year. Perhaps my hon. Friend could help them to ensure that they win the competition next time around.

Local Government Reorganisation

19. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his Department's proposals for the organisation of local government in the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland.

Mr. Gummer: I hope to be able to announce a decision very soon.

Mr. Duncan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and for his continuing detailed interest in this unique decision affecting Rutland. May I invite him to

investigate whether his Department might publish its assessment of the costs and practicality of granting unitary status to Rutland?

Mr. Gummer: Rutland has almost unparalleled support for its own special nature, as I have seen in all that I have read. There are obvious problems with an area which has a population of just 33,000 or so, but we are certainly looking at the proposals—not only the commission's proposals to me, but those that my hon. Friend has put to me.

Mr. McLoughlin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, if unitary status is given to Rutland, many of us will want to know why district councils which are larger than Rutland and have made cases for unitary status have been denied it?

Mr. Gummer: The commission has made certain recommendations and happens to have recommended Rutland for that purpose and not my hon. Friend's excellent district council. I want to try to achieve a coherent result, and special circumstances distinguish some places from others.

Coalfield Communities Campaign

20. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons he declined the invitation of Councillor Hedley Salt for any Minister in his Department to address a major conference of the Coalfield Communities Campaign in London at any hour of any date of his choosing in February.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside met a delegation led by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) only this week. I am meeting a delegation from the group led by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle), and my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has met Mr. Salt on four occasions in the recent past, including a visit to his town to see the city challenge, which was partly attracted there because of the closure of mines.

Mr. Dalyell: Should it not be a high priority in the Department's strategy to face up to the appalling problem—now that so many mine pumps have gone silent—of water systems which are seriously injured?

Mr. Gummer: The list of occasions on which that and other matters have been discussed recently shows that it is a high priority. We are trying to solve the problem, but the hon. Gentleman will agree that to do so we need to balance a range of different matters. In my judgment, we are getting the balance about right.

Mr. Dobson: Although none of the Ministers at the Department could be bothered to turn up at a meeting that the Coalfield Communities Campaign was willing to organise on any date convenient to them, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that it is necessary for the Government to take immediate action to make sure that pumping continues in disused mines and is recommenced in a number of others? If not, rivers and streams in the coalfield communities—which were so badly betrayed by the pit closure programme two years ago—will be grossly polluted.

While the right hon. Gentleman is on his feet, will he also tell the House what progress is being made towards establishing the enterprise zones in the coalfield communities, which were so prominently promised two years ago and on which nothing has yet been done?

Mr. Gummer: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, we are going through the detailed procedure which is necessary under European legislation. On his first point, he shows yet again that he does not know his facts and that he has not done his homework. The truth is that there is a commitment from the Government—made without any pressure from the hon. Gentleman—to carry out what he has asked for. The hon. Gentleman really ought to check his facts before he gets to his feet.

Mr. Riddick: If my right hon. Friend did attend a conference organised by the Coalfield Communities Campaign, would it not provide him with an opportunity to point out the excellent work carried out by British Coal Enterprise in creating more than 100,000 new jobs in those areas which have been hit by pit closures?

Mr. Gummer: We have been able to do that on the large number of occasions on which we have met those concerned. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who leads for the Opposition on this, is now descending to cheap jibes, and has ceased to understand the facts at all.

Environment Bill *[Lords]*

22. **Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received recently from environmental groups regarding the Environment Bill *[Lords]*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have received a number of representations from a range of organisations and individuals with an interest in the Environment Bill. Most of those representations have raised subjects also addressed by amendments being discussed as the Bill makes progress through another place.

Ms Ruddock: The Minister will therefore know that all the major conservation groups—with membership now amounting to some 5 million—supported the successful amendment in another place to the definition of the purposes of national parks. Notwithstanding the pressure that the Minister will come under from those promoting noisy sports, will he give an undertaking to include the promotion of quiet enjoyment in the purposes of national parks?

Mr. Atkins: I should be interested to hear how the hon. Lady defines quiet enjoyment. That point came up during the debates in another place. If the hon. Lady had read any of the debates, she would have seen that at least one Law Lord suggested that the definition as amended is rather bad law and needs to be qualified more carefully. I should be interested to know what effect the hon. Lady feels that the promotion of quiet enjoyment currently in the Bill would have on the RAC rally, which is one of the biggest sporting events in the country and which hundreds of thousands people go to watch as it passes though national parks. If the hon. Lady wants that rally to be abolished, she is going the right way about it.

Surcharged Councillors

23. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what circumstances councillors can be surcharged.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Under sections 19 and 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982, the auditor has powers to declare items of account unlawful and to recover, by surcharge of those responsible, any financial loss sustained by the authority as a result of illegal action or wilful misconduct by officers or members of the authority.

Mr. Field: Has my hon. Friend heard that some of the wishy-washy Liberal Democrat councillors on the Isle of Wight are telling their electorate that they cannot possibly refuse to grant a licence for an open-air pop festival on the island this summer because they might be surcharged? Does he agree that, like the leader of their party, they have a pathological dislike of any difficult decision and that that reason is almost as much balderdash as one of their manifestos, and is completely untrue?

Mr. Jones: It certainly sounds like a Liberal cop-out to me. I am sure that my hon. Friend will put those councillors and, for that matter, their electors in touch with the legal advisers to the local authority concerned, who will be delighted to confirm that only illegal action or wilful misconduct would result in a surcharge, which therefore seems unlikely in the case that he raises.

Mr. Betts: Does the Minister accept that, if councillors engage in corrupt practices, they can be subject to criminal processes and surcharged? If he and his colleagues have evidence to support the allegations made today by the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) about corruption in Labour authorities, is he not surprised that far more councils have not been surcharged over the years? Does he believe that the majority of Labour councils are corrupt, as the right hon. Gentleman alleged? If so, what evidence does he have to prove that?

Mr. Jones: Certainly they are incompetent; I do not know whether they are corrupt. The hon. Gent should note that among those providing evidence for investigation into councillors are some of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Thomason: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the distribution of housing improvement grant for the purposes of gaining party political advantage, as alleged in the case of Birmingham city council, could be surchargeable?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who has been campaigning strongly on that issue, has drawn attention to malpractices in Birmingham which must be investigated. I look forward with interest to the results of those investigations.

Mr. Barnes: Twenty-one councillors in Clay Cross in my constituency were surcharged in the early 1970s, before the passing of the legislation to which the Minister referred. They were surcharged not on grounds of corruption but for political decisions that they took. Ten of those were surcharged a total sum of £2,300, which could be done only by charging them jointly and severally. People in my constituency are therefore keen to see that what is going on in Westminster and Wandsworth involving millions of pounds is properly dealt with under the law and that the surcharging provision applies.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening to what I said. I specifically mentioned the case of wilful misconduct, and the hon. Gentleman knows that breaking the law deliberately is wilful misconduct. The surcharge that he mentioned arose as a result of a conviction. The hon. Gentleman proves, as many of his colleagues have done time and again, that the Labour party could not be trusted with an independent judicial system because it does not believe in the process of the courts and of finding people guilty or innocent as a result of a judicial process. Labour Members want to hang, draw and quarter people without going through any of those processes.

Water (Capital Investment)

24. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of capital investment undertaken by the water industry since privatisation.

Mr. Atkins: Since 1990-91, the first full year of privatisation, the water industry's gross capital expenditure has been about £15 billion.

Mr. Ottaway: I welcome that level of investment, which certainly would not have happened under a Labour Government, but does my hon. Friend feel that it is doing enough to exert downward pressure on prices? In my constituency, Thames Water supplies water to the north of the constituency at 40 per cent. below the price at which East Surrey Water supplies it in the south of the constituency. What is he doing to encourage more competition between adjacent water companies?

Mr. Atkins: I understand my hon. Friend's problem. He will know that the matter is for the water regulator— *[Interruption.]* As usual, the Opposition want it both ways. If the regulator is independent, they suggest that we should attack the regulator; if it is the reverse, they say that we are interfering. The regulator has a task to fulfil. My hon. Friend has raised that point in the past. I will ensure that the regulator understands the depth of his concern and reports to me accordingly.

Mr. Tipping: If the water companies were to borrow more against their assets, could they not invest more capital and reduce water charges?

Mr. Atkins: As usual, the Labour party has got it wrong. As a result of the Government's policy of privatising water, there is now more money available to do the necessary remedial work in a wide variety of areas, the cost of which would otherwise have been borne by the taxpayer. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that his party would be prepared to spend yet more money if it were in government, I should like to know where that money would come from.

Mr. Mans: Will my hon. Friend compare the figure that he has just given for investment in water infrastructure since privatisation with what happened during the 1970s, when the average amount spent per year on water infrastructure decreased from £900 million to £500 million between 1974 and 1979? Does that not show

the success of privatisation in increasing investment in water infrastructure and giving everyone better water and a better system?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is quite right. He is in a position to know about the matter because, in Fleetwood in his constituency, North West Water is spending hundreds of millions of pounds to complete a sewage treatment centre which will solve some of the problems of sewage outflow on to the beaches. That is a substantial sum of money and it is indicative of the changed attitude of the water companies, now privatised, compared with their outlook under the dead hand of nationalisation.

National Rivers Authority

26. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the total number of people working for the National Rivers Authority was (a) when it was first established and (b) on the latest available figures.

Mr. Atkins: At the end of March 1990, NRA staff numbered 6,535; at the end of March 1994, the figure was 7,709.

Mr. Williams: The Minister will know that the establishment of the National Rivers Authority was supported by the Labour party and has proved a great success. Does he agree that the excellent people in pollution control will form the basis of the Environmental Protection Agency, and that their good work must continue in that agency?

Mr. Atkins: I am delighted to say that the hon. Gentleman is entirely correct. The NRA and the people involved with it have done a great job. Many people involved in angling, for example, believe that the water bailiffs perform significant and important tasks along the river banks. During the progress of the Environment Bill, the Government intend to ensure that the NRA, like the other agencies to be subsumed into the new environment agency, will continue to play a very important role.

Mr. Jessel: As my constituency has more River Thames bank than any other constituency in Greater London, I can inform my hon. Friend that the River Thames is in excellent condition, which is a great credit to the National Rivers Authority and to the Government who established that agency.

Mr. Atkins: As a fellow riparian Member, with the River Ribble forming a substantial part of the boundary of my constituency, I know only too well what the NRA has achieved. I am delighted that my hon. Friend and I agree on that issue, as on so many others.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Does the Minister recognise that there is concern within the National Rivers Authority about the reduced level of staffing foreshadowed in the annual report published two days ago? That will do nothing to assist the National Rivers Authority in taking necessary action on the issue of abandoned mines, which was raised at the Coalfield Communities Campaign conference. We cannot address that serious issue without having sufficient staff levels in the monitoring agencies such as the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Lady, like so many Opposition Members, believes that more people should be involved in performing those tasks than we believe is warranted. As I said to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), the NRA is an extremely efficient organisation WHICH has performed extremely well over the years. It has improved its operation, increased its productivity and done the job more efficiently.

The hon. Lady's point about abandoned mines is well taken. I had a very interesting and constructive meeting with her right hon. Friend the Opposition Chief Whip only yesterday, when we discussed those matters at some length. He agreed with me that, give or take a nuance or two, he and others support what we are trying to do.

Housing Management

28. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his plans for the application of compulsory competitive tendering to housing management.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have put in place the legislative framework extending compulsory competitive tendering to housing management. The first contracts are due to be in operation from April 1996. I am pleased to say that local authorities are making good progress with their preparations.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that compulsory competitive tendering has been one of the most successful Government policies, in that it has at long last brought some common sense even to some Labour authorities? Is it not greatly to be welcomed that compulsory competitive tendering can be brought into a further sector of local authority financial operations so that we may have an improvement in the standard of housing management right across the country, even in Labour and Liberal Democrat authorities, as they will be forced to use business common sense?

Mr. Jones: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. I would particularly point out to him that, for the first time in years, Labour and Liberal councils are being forced to talk to their tenants about what they want in terms of standards and methods of organisation. That is one of the great successes of compulsory competitive tendering.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not know whether you have noticed the remarkable similarity between Questions 1, 5 and 11 on today's Order Paper, and I was wondering whether by chance they might be related. During Environment questions, we might understandably turn our minds to the planting of trees and flowers, but is it not going a bit far when the only planting is that of Opposition questions? I wonder whether, during your busy day, you might have the opportunity to see how three complicated but identically worded questions came to be tabled.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman examined the Order Paper as often and thoroughly as I do, he would find that there are many planted questions, many of which come from his side of the House.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Today the Audit Commission published a report stating that one in three consultants with large private practices had missed 10 per cent. of their operating sessions and that was an underestimate. Health questions were yesterday. It is most convenient that the report has come out the day after Health questions. That happens again and again, and I wonder whether I could seek your help to ensure that these reports come out on the day when they are most useful to hon. Members in challenging the responses of Ministers to Health questions.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps I should inform the hon. Lady and the House that I have no authority whatsoever over the publication of reports. I can understand the frustrations of the hon. Lady and the House on these matters. All I can advise her to do is pursue the matter through Ministers and the Order Paper, as I am sure she will.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may have seen the report in *The Scotsman* that the electoral registration officer in Tayside has ordered an urgent inquiry into the possible misuse and misrepresentation of postal and proxy votes in Dundee, in particular the case of a 91-year-old woman who has had her postal vote changed to a proxy vote in the name of a Labour activist to whom she gave no authorisation, and whom she did not know.

Madam Speaker: It is all a long way geographically from the Chair. Will the hon. Gentleman relate his question to my responsibilities?

Mr. Robertson: With regard to electoral matters, do you have any authority to institute an inquiry into the misuse of postal votes and vote-rigging in another Labour authority?

Madam Speaker: The Speaker of this House has no such authority.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any questions from the Government for a Transport Minister or a Scottish Office Minister to make a statement today about the lunchtime announcement by the British Railways Board of the cancellation with effect from May of the sleeper on the Motorail services to Scotland?

You will recall that, the week before last, at Question Time, the Prime Minister gave myself and the House a categorical assurance that meetings would be available to an all-party delegation to see the Secretary of State for Transport and the Prime Minister about these matters. That pledge has now been made a mockery by that grotesque breach of faith. What are Ministers going to do about it? Have they approached you to explain themselves?

Madam Speaker: I have had no indication from a Minister that they are seeking to make a statement on that matter today. I can only advise the hon. Gentleman to use the Order Paper, and to table questions to Ministers who have some responsibility in these matters, as I am sure he will do.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you assist me by telling me how I can clarify a confusion that seems to have arisen over a statement by the Director General of Ofgas, Miss Clare Spottiswoode, who told a seminar yesterday that utility regulation is flawed—too dependent on the individuals responsible for it—and that the system is weakened by the regulator's lack of accountability. Is it possible for a Minister to clarify the difficulty that has now arisen?

Madam Speaker: I have no authority over statements made by Ministers, let alone anyone outside the House.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I recognise that you cannot call a Minister into the Chamber to make a statement, but under a well-known system, Ministers can come here to be held accountable to the House for their decisions or actions. What steps can be taken by hon. Members when someone who holds a senior position in the House, as Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, is accused of abusing his position? Is it possible for him to come to the House, make a statement and be questioned on it, or can he remain silent on an issue involving his responsibility for issuing share options—very generously, moreover?

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that Committees of the House rightly have a great deal of autonomy. It is for the Committee to take any action that it considers fit.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not the custom of the House for an hon. Member who intends to attack another to give notice to that Member?

Mr. McLoughlin: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have done so.

Madam Speaker: My goodness! My wise words are getting through.

Mr. McLoughlin: I telephoned the office of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). I should add that there are four telephone numbers for him in the directory.

Madam Speaker: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman has taken all possible steps. I am delighted to hear that my wise words are getting through to hon. Members.

Animal Health (European Law)

3.36 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Animal Health Act 1981 to provide that European Community law shall not interfere with the validity or legal effectiveness under the laws of the United Kingdom of any prohibitions or restrictions on the export of animals which the designated Ministers shall certify to be justified.

I am pleased to say that my Bill has cross-party support. It has Euro-sceptic support, Euro-enthusiast support, vegetarian support, meat-eating support and even meat exporting support.

Until recently, the small town of Brightlingsea was a little-known, peaceful corner of my constituency on the Essex coast. There is only one road into the town—three miles of twisting lane across a beautiful Essex valley. Brightlingsea is a close-knit community of small streets, friendly shops, good schools and a delicate economy, dependent as much on a fragile network of small indigenous employers as on employment in nearby Colchester and elsewhere on the Tendring peninsula.

The words "Brightlingsea port" give entirely the wrong impression. This is no Shoreham or Dover; Brightlingsea creek is a natural haven for small boats, dinghies and yachts. Only one small vessel can berth at the whnarf, which itself looks large and out of place. It can be reached only by driving through the heart of the town. The wharf did little trade until the export of live animals began in January this year.

I beg the House to understand the depth and strength of the reaction that the trade through Brightlingsea has provoked. Just as the convoys of 40-tonne trucks thundering down the crowded main street have shattered the peace of the town, so the issue of live exports has roused many ordinary people to anger, outrage and despair. There are some in the town who do not support the protesters, and also a large number who are sympathetic to their aims but increasingly resent the disruption and expense of the protests.

I would, however, fail in my duty as a Member of Parliament if I did not impress on the House the huge public feeling on the issue that exists in Brightlingsea. My right hon. and hon. Friends will know that, in fact, public concern extends far more widely than the places that are involved directly in the trade. All those concerned demand action from their representatives in Parliament.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister hit exactly the right note when he met a group of Brightlingsea protesters on a recent visit to East Anglia. He said that he would "much prefer" to see animals transported in carcase form, and during Question Time on 10 January he expressed a preference for export on the hook rather than on the hoof. I agree.

I pay tribute to our Ministers who are dealing with the issue. Both my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his doughty Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning)—whose presence I am pleased to note—have made progress in the European Council. But even if agreement is reached, and over-long journeys and veal crates are banned under EC law, it is unlikely that implementation by other states will meet the high animal welfare standards that we expect in the United Kingdom.

It is at this point that most people feel that the United Kingdom should at least be able to implement selective bans on live exports. The anger and frustration of Brightlingsea people are, however, turned to fury when Ministers explain their powerlessness under European Community law.

My legal advice is the same as that of Ministers: we cannot apply article 36 of the treaty on European union unilaterally. Subsequent EC directives have brought it into the occupied field of EC legal competence; but this issue has, perhaps as much as any other, brought home to the British public the huge extent of the powers that Governments have signed away in Europe. They rightly feel that the argument about live exports from the United Kingdom should be settled by the United Kingdom Parliament, not left hostage to the vested interests of foreign Governments.

This Bill does not directly ban live exports—I can reassure the Minister on that point. It restores the powers of Ministers under the Animal Health Act 1981—powers that most people believe that Ministers should never have given away. I must tell the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) that, even if his Protection of Calves (Export) Bill became an Act of Parliament, its failure to tackle the issue of European law would leave United Kingdom Ministers powerless to implement it. But I am grateful for the fact that he is sponsoring this Bill.

The Bill has two main elements. Clause 1 first makes it clear that the Animal Health Act 1981 may be used to impose a general export ban, and that it is not restricted merely to regulating the means and mode of export. The power to impose a ban may be exercised on the grounds of cruelty to the animals in the country of destination, not just on the grounds of suffering during the journey.

Most people would agree that this is the sort of sanction that Ministers require, to demonstrate that they are serious about ensuring that EC animal welfare legislation is properly enforced. Ministers may certify that any such export ban

"is in their opinion justified for the protection of health and life of humans, animals or plants, notwithstanding that it may prohibit or restrict the exportation of animals to other member states and that such prohibition or restriction does not constitute a means of arbitrary discrimination or disguised restriction on trade between member states".

This follows the wording of article 36 of the treaty on European union. So the Bill would simply allow Ministers to exercise powers that they thought were protected by article 36 when they signed the Single European Act in the first place.

The second main element of the Bill is designed to protect Ministers' actions from possible prosecution under Community law. Section 2(1) of the European Communities Act 1972 provides that Community law shall be

"recognised and available in law"

in the United Kingdom. Section 2(4) of the Act provides that any future Act

"shall be construed and have effect subject to"

section 2(1). My Bill denies legal force under the law of the United Kingdom to any rule of Community law that would interfere with the export ban, so it becomes Parliament's express wish, if necessary, to override this part of the 1972 Act.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

What is the effect of the Bill? If Ministers chose to apply an export ban on grounds of cruelty to animals in the country of destination, Parliament would have made it clear that the UK courts would be obliged to uphold UK law in the matter, against EC law if necessary. This would probably put the United Kingdom in breach of EC law. At a meeting with the Minister, her officials told me that this Act "would not work", implying that our courts would override the express wish of Parliament to exclude EC law.

If the courts fail Parliament in this regard, it will have been proved beyond dispute that parliamentary sovereignty is incompatible with continued membership of the European Community on the current basis. That in turn flies in the face of all the assurances given by Ministers about parliamentary sovereignty on the Floor of the House.

Although Parliament instructed our courts to enforce EC law in the 1972 Act, no Parliament can bind its successor. As a sovereign Parliament, we should never allow people to claim that we are powerless to enact and to enforce legislation just because it is contrary to European Union law. I doubt that any hon. Member would be happy to see Parliament being lectured by Ministry of Agriculture officials about that on which it can or cannot legislate.

The Bill restores the UK's choice to decide the live exports issue—a choice that most British people believe that this country should have. It would add authority to Government actions, because Ministers would be pursuing a policy that they could claim as their own, instead of one forced on them. Nothing could be more corrosive to the idea of democratic accountability than to find ourselves saying that we have given away the power to decide matters for ourselves without consent or explanation, and without realising that we were doing that at the time.

Anyone who has argued in favour of a ban on live exports should feel obliged to support my Bill, as it is the only effective means of enacting a ban. I am more than a little scornful of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) for sponsoring the Protection of Calves (Export) Bill, when his reluctance to sponsor my Bill suggests that he finds the truth about the position in the EU too difficult to handle.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Bernard Jenkin, Sir Andrew Bowden, Mr. Roger Knapman, Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. David Evans, Mr. Nick Harvey, Mr. Eric Martlew, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mr. Tony Banks and Mr. Bill Olner.

ANIMAL HEALTH (EUROPEAN LAW)

Mr. Bernard Jenkin accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Animal Health Act 1981 to provide that European Community law shall not interfere with the validity or legal effectiveness under the laws of the United Kingdom of any prohibitions or restrictions on the export of animals which the designated Ministers shall certify to be justified: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 March, and to be printed. [Bill 81.]

ESTIMATES DAY

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1994-95

Class IV, Vote 1

Broadband Communications

[Relevant documents: Third Report from the Trade and Industry Committee of Session 1993-94, on Optical Fibre Networks (House of Commons Paper No. 285); the Department of Trade and Industry Paper on Creating the Superhighways of the Future: Developing Broadband Communications in the UK (Cm 2734); and the Department of Trade and Industry Annual Report 1995: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995-96 to 1997-98 (Cm 2804).]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £1,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1995 for expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on support for business, research and development; consumer protection and the regulation of trade, energy related programmes, including research and development, and residual privatisation expenses; departmental administration, central and miscellaneous services; security of oil and gas supplies; the operational costs of departmental executive agencies and associated research laboratory privatisation expenses; the provision of land and building; loans, grants and other payments.—[*Mr. Ian Taylor.*]

3.47 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I place on record my appreciation of the excellent service given by the Clerks to all Select Committees and their back-up staff, because the amount of work they do on the many good reports presented to the House sometimes goes unnoticed.

This is probably the first time that the House has had the opportunity to debate in depth the importance of the information super-highway, and to question whether Government policy is helping or hindering the development of advanced communication networks and services. Such a debate is long overdue, because the issues are of real significance to this country's future competitiveness, and they will shape the life style and work patterns of millions of people.

The information super-highway has implications for the way that the House conducts its business and hon. Members conduct their working lives. The Committee took the opportunity to undertake the first video conferencing of an official Committee of the House. I was pleased to learn that the House is planning to offer that facility, and that arrangements are under way for the House's own research network to be available on the Internet.

Our report on the super-highway was the first Select Committee report ever placed on the Internet, but not by the House authorities or the Select Committee Clerks—somebody else did us that courtesy. The House does not offer that service, but makes our report available only in hard copy form, through a limited number of outlets.

The problem is that the report is expensive. I have received several inquiries from academic bodies in particular, which want such reports made more accessible on their databases. Government Departments and agencies were recently connected to the Internet. We called for that in our report, and I welcome that development.

A number of local authorities are also on the system, as are most large companies and universities. It is perhaps time that *Hansard* and Select Committee reports and other parliamentary information was also made available on Internet. The cost is minuscule, and it can only help raise the standard of the House.

The United States Congress has been on Internet for several years. I can access the Congress World Wide Web information service at any time, for the price of a local telephone call. The menu covers the full text of congressional debates and reports and judgments, as well as the e-mail addresses of Congressmen. That system might be popular with hon. Members. There is even a special mail box through which people can request information or contact a particular person.

If that is possible for the US Congress, why should it not be possible here? I have already raised that question with the Liaison Committee, and I hope that, if it comes before the House, it will be supported. I shall now return to the Select Committee report on optical fibre networks and the information super-highway, which was published last July.

The Government's response to our report took the form of a Command Paper, issued in November. Last month, there was a G7 summit on the global super-highway, and, as many hon. Members may know, the Labour party has set up its own information super-highway policy forum. The enormous interest generated by our report has certainly concentrated a few minds in the Department of Trade and Industry. Although we were disappointed by the Government's response, our report has put the issue firmly on the political agenda. There is now a widely held view that we need a nationwide network sooner rather than later. I think that the Minister will agree.

I welcome the enthusiasm that the Minister has brought to his portfolio, and I hope that it will affect Government policy. The potential for industry, jobs and leisure is vast. Our report states that broadband networks and services are likely to be critical to the competitiveness of businesses and a major factor in attracting inward investment. The report also emphasises the enormous potential social benefits for education, skills training, health care and local government services. However, getting the full benefit depends on the speed at which the highway and the new multi-media services can be developed, and on making the network as open and accessible as possible.

Our report highlights the significant benefits to industry and states that the information industry is expanding worldwide faster than anyone expected. The telecommunications industry alone is growing at such a pace that, within a few years, it will overtake Europe's motor industry in its impact on GDP. I say that to make the point that the competitive advantage of the information industry is relative, and that those countries which develop the networks and software first will corner the market.

To get investment in new broadband services requires an integrated and accessible network. The Committee's concern is that we may not get the infrastructure in place in time, and will fail to stimulate growth in new and innovative software applications.

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

The networks and services must develop together, and we must keep the policy of attracting new investment in both. Unlike the Americans and the Japanese, the Government are reluctant to set a target date for the super-highway. They seem preoccupied with encouraging so-called competition for local cable franchises. We should concentrate on encouraging the development of a nationwide broadband network, with maximum usage for broadband services. That is what the French, the Dutch and the Germans are doing.

Just last week, France Telecom announced that it would bring forward new investments for expanding its optical fibre network to meet the French target of a nationwide super-highway by 2015. Meanwhile, Japan and the United States have set firm target dates for connecting up all schools and hospitals by 2000 and 2010. The problem for the Government is that they cannot set any targets, because there is no certainty that the cable companies can meet them. Under current regulations, there is no incentive to push ahead anyway.

Our report argues that our regulatory system hinders the development of broadband networks and services. We could see no logic in keeping the regulatory rules which ban BT and Mercury from providing cable television. Repealing them would provide the income stream that is needed for investment in the new broadband networks and services.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I think that my hon. Friend is arguing the point that British Telecom principally, and Mercury to some extent, are the only telecom operators that can provide the broadband network nationally and send fibre into every home, and that that provides the sole basis for the integrated national network that can put Britain in the lead in the super-highway. Does he agree that, unless we have that, we will lag behind competitor countries such as the United States, Japan and Germany, when in fact we invented the technology?

Mr. Caborn: That is a good point, and one on which the report concentrates. As I develop the theme, the historical context in which regulation arose will show the weakness in the application of that regulation.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The hon. Gentleman is aware of my declared interest in the cablecoms industry. Is he confident that BT would have invested the £10 billion in cable networks that the cable companies are proposing to invest this century if it had not been given some regulatory confirmation that it would have a return on its capital?

Mr. Caborn: That is a hypothetical question. The Select Committee report deals with practical matters, and the situation as it is today. We have tried to develop with the cable companies and with both BT and Mercury an information super-highway for the early part of the 21st century. Therefore, no useful point would be served by answering the hon. Gentleman's question. We have tried to look forward and judge how we can best match what we have now with the cables and the PTOs, and develop that for the full information super-highway for the early part of the 21st century.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am following what my hon. Friend is saying with great interest. If we are to achieve what the Select Committee wants us to achieve, the question of the asymmetry rule must be addressed by the Government. As I understand it, the rule will only be reviewed in the year 2001, with no guarantee that it will be changed. If it is not changed, it is clear that British Telecom will not invest the £15 billion required to put fibre into the domestic network.

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. He will find the Select Committee's answer to it as I develop my speech. I am sure that the Minister will be delighted to answer my hon. Friend's question. After all, it applies more to the Minister than it does to me.

As I was saying, we could see no logic in keeping the rules that ban BT and Mercury. The Committee asked why, when the predominantly US-owned cable companies have a privileged monopoly in our backyard, when BT tries to compete within the US it does not get equal access to the US market. That should be a matter for concern for the Government.

The entertainment ban was built into the regulation when cabling was in its infancy. At the time, there was some sense in giving fledgling British cable companies a helping hand. However, the position has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. The franchise has been sold on, and the big US cable and telecom companies seem more interested in taking on BT in the standard telephony market than in creating a national super-highway.

The Government have made some concessions at the margins to BT and Mercury, and they are welcome; however, the ban remains open-ended. The Committee would have had more sympathy with the Government's position if the cable companies were attracting a higher take-up rate for cable television and promoting new interactive services. The fact is that they are not. The penetration rate for cable take-up is currently 21 per cent.—the same as it was in 1992. In the US, it is more than 70 per cent.

In some areas, cable has not even begun. I received a letter only last week from a couple in Hackney complaining that they could not get cable television. The couple contacted the local franchise holder, Cable London, to ask when they could expect their street to be cabled up. They were told to call back some time in 1997.

Our report also pointed out our concern that the majority of cable companies were not investing in optical fibre networks, or offering new broadband services. The evidence we received—and it was pretty extensive—showed a mosaic of cable networks using mostly traditional copper or coaxial-based technologies. We could find few examples of cable companies experimenting with advanced broadband networks that have the ability to deliver interactive, two-way television.

Even if the cable companies met their build obligations in full, it would still leave more than a third of the country without access to a fixed cable network. The Select Committee felt that the scales had been tipped too far in favour of the cable companies, and that now was the time to start opening up the market by lifting the entertainment ban and by providing for open access to any cable network.

Some cable franchises have been protected for 10 years, and they could run for a minimum of another seven years. It could be even longer than that, unless policy is changed. Despite the Minister's suggestion, the Committee could find no technical or legal problem with phasing out the ban.

The way forward must be to get BT, Mercury and the cable companies to build a national network together. That can be achieved by relaxing the regulations franchise by franchise, with the aim of lifting all restrictions on BT and Mercury by end of 2002. As a quid pro quo, we recommended that BT and Mercury should be required to allow open access to their networks, and to be given the task of linking all public facilities to the super-highway as soon as possible.

The benefits of that approach are spelled out in our report. First, it would enable BT and Mercury to begin investing the £15 billion to £20 billion necessary to develop a national broadband network, without denying some protection to existing cable companies. Secondly, it would provide an incentive for cable companies to expand and upgrade their networks, both to private customers and to the public service users. Thirdly, it would create the certainty and purpose that is lacking.

The certainty is not just for telecommunications and cable companies; the problem affects the hundreds of UK firms which are supplying the technology and the software. Their concern is the long lead time they need to develop broadband technology. With the present uncertainty, those firms cannot take the risk that, in five or 10 years' time, BT may be able to start investing in broadband networks and services. We will end up having to buy the technology and equipment from United States, Japan or other countries.

Most of the cable companies said that they could live with our proposals, yet the Minister keeps telling us that the status quo is preferable, because it offers stability. The Committee could not accept that. We argued that keeping things as they are creates uncertainties. We could not accept that regulations could be changed only on competition grounds, set by the Director General of Telecommunications. That is nonsense. The creation of a national information super-highway is a policy issue with wide-ranging public interests and economic implications. It is not for the regulator to dictate the policy or to set the strategic framework. That is the Government's job.

If our proposals would thwart competition, I could understand why the regulator might want to keep things as they are, but our suggestion implies more, not less, competition. We argued that the phased lifting of the entertainment ban and opening up the markets franchise by franchise would provide for more open access under an integrated network.

The idea that ring-fencing local cable monopolies will lead to competing national networks with open access to anyone does not add up. For a start, the competition is not there, and if the entertainment ban stays, it is unlikely to emerge. Even if we end up with competing national networks, which has as much strategic logic as competing rail networks, we should ensure that parity and equality of access exist. Are we not in danger of creating a piecemeal, multi-tiered highway of local networks that deny universal service and customer choice?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): I shall pick up the points that the hon. Gentleman is making when I speak later, but I must ask him a specific question. If there is so much wrong with the Government's policy, why has the European Union adopted—belatedly—the same principles? Why were we able to establish the principles of liberalisation and competition in relation to, among other things, alternative infrastructures as part of the G7 conference's conclusions?

Mr. Caborn: Trying to liberalise the market and develop third-party access is to be welcomed. The Select Committee challenged the Minister about why we are protecting the cable companies for a now indeterminate length of time, possibly well into the 21st century. Our major PTOs—BT and Mercury—should be allowed to enter the entertainment market. The central question concerns the regulatory regime. The Committee argued for liberalisation of the market and third-party access and, as the Minister knows, the quid pro quo was that BT and Mercury open up to the cable companies.

What confounded some members of the Committee was that, although this is the Government of competition and open markets, we have to ask them to introduce competition by phasing in the lifting of the franchise. Only the Government do not accept the idea but I have no doubt that, with his enthusiasm for his new post, the Minister will change that.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that what we need above all in interactive broadband communications is innovation, but that the monopoly arrangements introduced by the Government, whereby there is to be one franchise holder for an indefinite period, will not lead to that innovation?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Select Committee expressed the same concern, and suggested ways out of the present regulatory system, which would lead to the conditions under which such innovation could occur.

Access—public and private—is extremely important. It is essential that we develop a national network that provides open access for public and private service users. If we do not, I fear that we run the risk of an information society for the haves, with no access for the have-nots.

The Select Committee set out to deal with two key questions. Are the Government doing enough to develop the super-highway that we shall need by the turn of the century, and are the policies and regulations flexible enough to ensure that we are moving fast enough relative to our major competitors? On both counts, the Committee concluded that the Government must think again. We warned of the cost of delaying and dithering any longer.

The Select Committee recommended a compromise solution with which the telecom side and the cable industry said they could live. They want an end to uncertainty, and they want the Government to stop procrastinating. We emphasised in our report that the situation has changed dramatically since the cable franchises and the entertainment ban were introduced. Government policy, and the regulations, should reflect that.

There is still time to act, and I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity today to follow through the main recommendations in the report.

4.8 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly. I have been away in the United States and was not aware that this debate was being held today. I found myself in the embarrassing position of having a commitment to chair a meeting

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

elsewhere in the House at 4 pm, which is why I absented myself during part of the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn). I apologise; my absence was not intended as a discourtesy, and I shall certainly read his speech in *Hansard*.

It is sad that there does not appear to be as much interest in this subject in the House as there would be if the debate were taking place in a school or college. The young understand the importance of the Internet and the super-highway. I have to ask my 22-year-old son for advice on the use of computers, or, better still, my 18-year-old son—both are experts. The young are well seized of the importance of this subject. They understand its significance and the fact that it will change their way of life and how they work. Those of us who are rather older are finding it more difficult to adjust to the world of computers and the world of the Internet.

I first found myself becoming involved in the general subject when, as a Minister responsible for industry in Northern Ireland, I discovered a European proposal to lay a fibre-optic link around Northern Ireland in 1987. It seemed quite interesting, and that it would provide better communications. I was told that it would provide "more bandwidth, Minister" and I had to find out what bandwidth meant. I discovered that it meant the opportunity to use more and more electronic and electrical devices on the cable system which was to be laid around Northern Ireland.

Later, we were among the first in Northern Ireland to use video conferencing—on a secure network between Whitehall and Belfast. The object of the exercise was, in fact, to save money, because Ministers were running up such enormous bills for transport between London and Belfast.

I rapidly discovered that if one wished to make a point to one's own Secretary of State, one could not make it while sitting alongside him. One needed to make that point from the other end of the video conferencing facility. I rapidly developed the habit of flying to the other end to have a video conference with my Secretary of State, rather than driving up the hill to Stormont. Be that as it may, I still think that the system is worth while and will certainly develop.

In October 1989, I was approached to become chairman of a company which applied for cable communications franchises. I accepted. We were awarded five franchises. Subsequently, after various discussions about our future with different companies, we decided on a very happy marriage with NYNEX Cablecomms, and I declare an interest as a director of companies in the NYNEX group.

What is broadband, what is bandwidth, and what can it do? First, of course, with bandwidth, people can talk to each other—so it is a telephone. One can send people messages—so it is a fax. One can watch programmes—so it is a television. One can talk to people and see them at the same time—so it is video conferencing. One can work from one's own house or building by communicating with others—so it is an office. One can sell things by promoting them across it—so it is a showroom. One can buy things through it—so it is a shop. One can carry out financial transactions through it—so it is a bank.

Those are all single interactions between, as it were, one person and another, but on the Internet, with broadband, one can do so much more. For instance, several people can join together in the same discussion from different parts of the world, so it can create a design laboratory.

In the past few weeks, I have seen two powerful examples of the use of cable and bandwidth. The first, the beautifully named Super-JANET, the super joint academic network, will enable advanced academic groups to link and talk to each other. I certainly have high hopes that the sixth form college in my constituency, of which I am chairman, will be able to link up with local cable communications, and, perhaps, in Gosport in the south of England, be able to listen to lectures given in Manchester or in the centre of England. All such developments will come.

Last week in Washington, at the Walter Reed hospital, we were shown facilities whereby medical signals and photographs may be sent by British forces in Belize to the hospital where, in Washington, American doctors may form a diagnosis and advise local people in Belize of the best treatment for the patient. Advanced communications can do so many things.

I am certainly convinced that the key to success is in the Command Paper, where it says:

"The spur to all this progress—

which it described—

"was the original decision to liberalise infrastructures and services."

BT was privatised in 1984, and very few people now, even the most extreme socialist Members, would say that BT would have made as much progress had it stayed in public ownership.

Then we moved on to the duopoly review, and the 1991 White Paper entitled "Competition and Choice Telecommunications Policy for the 1990s". That allowed cable companies to offer voice telephony in their own right. The key to that is that BT is prevented from conveying entertainment until 2001, with a review in, or not earlier than, 1998, and is prevented from providing entertainment services until 2001.

Those restrictions on BT have enabled cable companies to enter the business.

From my experience, I can tell the House that when my company was in the business of trying to raise funds for cable telecommunications development, we approached a very wide range of British institutions, but I am afraid that the interest was negligible. I regret that. I am happy that American, French and Canadian companies have been prepared to invest here, but it is most unfortunate that British companies are not very well represented—with, of course, the notable exception of Cable and Wireless and its affiliate Mercury. There would not have been a commitment to cable development if the Government had not laid down restrictions on BT. Those restrictions are absolutely critical.

The cable companies will spend £10 billion this decade. Because of the diversity of provision, I am confident that that will provide an ideal fibre-optic network throughout the United Kingdom. It will provide the basis upon which development will take place. It will not be the Government-controlled and dictated fibre-optic network which would be so attractive to some hon. Members. It will not be the Government-planned system which will

take fibre optics into every part of the United Kingdom, because it will be based entirely on competition and the opportunities of the companies involved to make profits.

I am convinced that the cable companies are making an enormous contribution. They are providing 30,000 jobs, and I believe that the way ahead now is as set out by the Government. I respect the Command Paper, in which I know the Minister is closely involved. I also respect the Government's point of view, and I am delighted that the Minister has taken such a keen interest in the matter and that he is driving the issue forward.

4.15 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I should like to preface my remarks by declaring an interest. I am proud to say that I am sponsored by the Communication Workers Union, which is the amalgamation of the old National Communications Union and the Union of Communications Workers. This is the first occasion on which a member of our group has been able to declare that interest in the House. I also declare an interest as a director of EURIM. That position is totally unpaid and without any expenses.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), all members of the Trade and Industry Select Committee and the Clerks and specialist advisers on the most important contribution that they have made to the debate. This debate is vital to the economic well-being of this country into the next century, and its impact has been largely ignored by the Government. I notice the paucity of Conservative Members present. I welcome the contribution made by the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), although I did not entirely agree with his comments. As he has known me for an awful lot of years, he will not be surprised about that.

We must consider where we are now, look at the kind of information super-highway we need and see how we can get there from our current position. The Select Committee made a major contribution to that end, but the Government must have a much clearer idea of the nature of competition, the customer, the provider and how the system operates.

It was clear from the Minister's intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central that his understanding of the Bangemann report and what the G7 summit came up with, and my understanding of that, are somewhat different. I do not believe that the G7 summit dreamt up the asymmetry rule to which my hon. Friend referred. Indeed, the Bangemann report recommends against that. I do not believe that the G7 summit recommended that our market should be so dominated by foreign and American companies, although it is.

How have we reached this point? I have been privileged to serve on every telecommunications Bill since 1979. I have been involved in all the debates. We reached the current position because a Secretary of State made a fundamental mistake. He thought that the competition was in the network and not in what could be provided on that network. That is where the real competition always resides.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): My hon. Friend is an expert on these matters. Does he agree that the asymmetric rule has caused havoc in many constituencies, as companies such as CableTel in my constituency tunnel through and churn up pavements without any regard to consultation with our constituents? Such companies are wreaking havoc as they are not properly reinstating the pavements and roads that they have dug up. Could not that have been avoided if the Government had adopted a more sensible policy?

Mr. McWilliam: I agree. One of the problems is that the cable companies are there to sell cable time and not to install cables. They largely employ casual labour to install the cables, and sometimes the skills of the casual labour are not up to the level that they ought to be. Indeed, I have seen instances in my constituency of a subcontractor shoving a mole drainer through the roots of many trees. As a noted horticulturist, my hon. Friend will understand the effects of that.

If the Government had recognised where the competition was in the first place, we would not have had that situation, but because of political dogma at the time, they decided that they knew best and that it was in the network. We know that that is not true.

We have to consider the sort of highway that we want. Unlike most cable company networks, it has to be two way and it has to be broadband. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central said, one of the problems with many local cable company networks is that they are a mixture of twisted pair, coaxial and fibre. What is more, hon. Members must be aware that there is more than one kind of fibre, and that fibres have more than one sort of capacity.

There is also more than one way of switching the network. I want to make certain that I stay within the constraints of intelligibility, so I shall not go into network architecture in any great detail. What most cable companies have adopted as the network architecture, however, delivers the minimum bandwidth to the customer, not the maximum—that is not a national broadband network.

The network has to be national and must offer services in cities and rural areas. Given the present situation, the cable companies are not capable of doing so and there is no intention whatever of cabling the rural areas—one third of the United Kingdom—so the existing network will not lead to a national network.

There are constraints; some are Government-imposed and some are not. There are the technological constraints that I just described, which are due to the network architecture that cable companies have adopted, and there are the technological constraints that are due to the fact that all the cable companies have not adopted the same technology. Some of the fibre could be incorporated in a network, but some could not.

We must not be dogmatic about this, either. The hon. Member for Gosport talked of renationalising British Telecommunications, but it is not a question of that—it would cost far too much, and no one on the Opposition Benches is arguing for it. We have to study our national communications carriers, such as BT and Mercury and the international companies, such as BT and Cable and Wireless, to find out whether we are serving our industrial interests throughout the world.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I hesitate to intervene, as my hon. Friend is a great expert on this subject, but is it not the case that, if one compares BT and the present cable suppliers—the incomers, as I would call them, as I come from Yorkshire—one sees that BT has a

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

great record of purchasing equipment from British suppliers? Is it not the case that, for all we were told 10 years ago—that, if we waited for fibre optics, which was a British invention, we would make it in Britain—the majority of the equipment purchased by the cable companies is imported from other countries?

Mr. McWilliam: In essence, that is true, in that many of the switches are imported. BT no longer purchases as much British equipment as it did, although it still purchases a great deal.

Mr. Sheerman: What about the cable?

Mr. McWilliam: No, it is not true. Most of the fibre optic cable is manufactured by BICC, which has the rights, and the copper cable also tends to be British, but much of the technology is not British and is not compatible with the existing network.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central was right to refer to the ownership of the cable companies. Ninety per cent. of cable companies are owned by United States telephone multinationals, at least one of which has a larger asset base than BT. Those are the very companies with which BT and Cable and Wireless are competing worldwide for a share of the telecommunications business. At the same time, British firms are not allowed into the markets in those countries.

We could almost describe that as industrial treason. The Government have legislated to allow companies into our market from countries that will not allow us into their market. They are destroying the profitability of our companies and their ability to invest worldwide and compete against those other companies.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I hesitate to intervene, as I shall pick up many of the hon. Gentleman's points later, but I cannot let him get away with that. Because of our action in opening up the United Kingdom market, British companies now have a better chance of getting into the American market than most of our European rivals. Vice-President Gore announced at the G7 conference that, one way or another, America would remove by the end of this year the 20 per cent. embargo that relates to foreign investment in United States telecommunications companies using spectrum radio, as long as the countries from which new investors are to come have liberalised. This country stands in very good stead in that reciprocal agreement. The opportunities in America—as well as in the rest of Europe, once it has liberalised—will be open to British-based companies.

Mr. McWilliam: The Minister is as innocent of American politics as he is of where the telecommunications market is. He knows as well as I do that Vice-President Gore will have to get that liberalisation through both Houses in the States.

Mr. Taylor: No.

Mr. McWilliam: He will, and it will be blocked.

Mr. Taylor: Vice-President Gore said in Brussels that his Administration would bring forward legislation that would need to get through both Houses, but that if there was a problem, he would do it by regulation. Therefore, he could give a guarantee that America would change the rule this year.

Mr. McWilliam: First, the American system is geared to kill legislation, not to facilitate it, like ours. Secondly, if the Vice-President thinks that he will get that measure through, he has got another think coming. He will not do it, because there are too many vested interests in too many states. Those might have been fine words for the G7 and they might have been quite helpful, but all Vice-President Gore is interested in is making sure that the Americans develop their own super-highway. It is not really in America's interests for Britain to develop our own.

We have a problem in that we have no access to the United States, despite the fact that the Minister says that Vice-President Gore will give us that access by the end of the year. I shall believe that when I see it. We have problems with access to Japan—one of our major competitors, which is developing its system—and to Germany, which is developing a system on the back of a national system. Britain has a fragmented system, with the asymmetry rule.

I shall give the Minister a statistic. The average telephone line in this country is used for six minutes a day. That is all. Nobody is going to put a fibre-optic link into a house for a line that is used for six minutes a day. The existing cable network is not capable of supporting a super-highway, and the £10 billion of investment that has been referred to will not support the information super-highway. The existing system was not designed for that, and it will not support it.

The only company that has the asset base to support the investment needed is British Telecom, because we are talking about an investment of some £15 billion. That will be the cost of just getting the local fibre-optic network in. In order to get universal coverage in the UK, the Government would have to make some other changes. They would have to drop the asymmetry rule, and they would also have to let British Telecom have radio tails on terminal ends in rural areas, because there is no other way of operating the system economically. That is another bar against BT.

The Government must allow BT and Mercury to carry entertainment services, as that is the only way in which that investment could be justified. Last year, BT's profit was £3 billion, which was reduced by £500 million because of the regulator's formula on pricing. An investment of £15 billion could not be supported on a commercial basis on that profit. The only way to proceed is to open up the market.

If we are to compete against the United States, Japan, Germany and other European Union partners, which we must as we approach the next century, we must have that information super-highway. We cannot have it with the dogmatic approach that the Government have adopted since 1979, so we must have a new approach. Oddly enough, the new approach is to free up the system rather than tell the cable companies that they cannot extend their customer base. The Government must lift the restrictions on BT and Mercury and allow them to sell entertainment services on their main network, too. Those companies could then justify to their shareholders the investment of £15 billion, which needs to be made into the next century to set up that super-highway. That is the only way in which that will happen.

I have taken enough of the House's time, as other hon. Members want to speak. This is an extremely important debate and I congratulate the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on its thorough approach to this subject. I respect the Minister's knowledge of and enthusiasm for this subject, but he must convey to his political masters the idea that the competition is not in the network but in what can be put on the network: entertainment, education and health services; business applications; and teleworking. He must also convey to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment the fact that the project entails a view of employment patterns in this society that must be dealt with before it comes in, so that we know where jobs will be lost and gained, and protection for teleworkers is built in.

Unless the Minister does those two things, we shall not have the super-highway that we need to take us into the next century and we shall be unable to support the economic development that we need to provide for people's services, welfare and health.

4.42 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution to this debate. I apologise to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) for not being present to hear all his speech. I attended to my duties as a member of the Committee of Selection for 10 minutes in the middle of his speech, but I undertake to remedy that by reading it in tomorrow's *Hansard*.

I, too, congratulate the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and its Chairman on the work that they have done. I also congratulate the Liaison Select Committee on selecting this extremely important subject for debate, which has implications for our industrial, economic, educational and domestic future.

I endorse what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) said about the services that the House of Commons has supplied through its parliamentary data and video network, and the use or otherwise that *Hansard* makes of electronic means of communications. It is essential that the House takes a lead in providing the infrastructure necessary not just for Members of Parliament to do their business more efficiently, cost effectively and faster, but to give a lead and show the worlds of commerce, industry and education that we attach importance to that new method of communication and are prepared to lead by example.

The PDVN should be developed faster and *Hansard* should make the information that it contains more freely and widely available by electronic means. I recognise the Minister's enthusiasm for the subject. He does good work and I know that he must win the arguments within the Department and the Treasury to further this matter. I hope that the Minister will give a commitment to examine electronic access to the PDVN and Hansard, as well as some of the other important aspects of the Select Committee's report.

Hon. Members are always a little sceptical when Ministers inform the House that they are about to work miracles and deliver more services at lower cost. In most instances, that proves to be untrue. However, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) referred to the extraordinary British invention of fibre-optic technology, which offers us the chance to improve services and save money at the same time.

I will concentrate on opportunities for education in the first half of my speech because I believe that education in the United Kingdom could become more responsive, flexible and probably cheaper in the long term by deploying the latest technology sensibly and by using the emerging information infrastructure.

Some right hon. and hon. Friends and I were fortunate to spend a few days in Washington about 10 days ago. During that visit, the leader of my party, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), had a long and stimulating conversation with the American Vice-President, Mr. Al Gore. As a result of the meeting, it became crystal clear that America is in the driving seat of information technology. There is a commitment within high levels of Government to ensure that America progresses across the different sectors within that technological area. If we are to keep the advantage that we have in many areas of technology, we must secure that same commitment at the same levels of Government in this country. That would be disastrous for both the United Kingdom and for Europe as a whole.

Interactive learning systems, including access to electronic libraries, will clearly revolutionise the way in which future generations are educated. It will become easier for individuals to explore, in their own time and in their own way, the subjects in which they are interested and perhaps develop that interest into a career.

We hear anecdotes and we read stories in the press about people who have otherwise dropped out of society but who have gone to cafes, surfed the Internet and have become experts in that area. In America we heard about people in Chicago, for example, who have accessed the library connections to Internet. They have become technological experts because they have engaged their interests and used their time to gain experience in retrieving information from the Internet, which—as those of us who have tried it will know—can often prove quite frustrating.

The Department for Education and parents must work together to define what they want to achieve to deliver a new educational philosophy for the future. As a nation, we must have training for life and I think that the optic-fibre network and the information super-highway will form an integral part of that training.

We must compete with technology from the Pacific basin, America and other parts of the world. In order to stay competitive, we must generate wealth, which involves cultivating an educated work force and an educated society. There is a little of the chicken-and-egg syndrome in that situation, but Liberal Democrats are quite clear about how we would break into that cycle. We would concentrate on education and invest in the future of the nation, thereby providing the wealth that we need. We do not believe that we can leave everything to the market.

I agreed wholeheartedly with that part of the speech of the hon. Member for Blaydon which I heard. I concur with what he said about excluding the British players, BT and Mercury, from participating in building communications infrastructure. I think that his argument is sound, and I hope that the Government will pay careful attention to it. We may agree in five or 10 years' time,

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

with the benefit of hindsight, that it was a monumental mistake to exclude the British players, and that banning them from broadcasting entertainment services until the year 2000 or 2001 in order to encourage inward investment from overseas companies was at best unwise, and at worst positively idiotic.

Excluding the British players certainly gave the American companies more than a head start, but it has been much worse than that. The American companies have cherry-picked the most lucrative areas of the country, establishing their own local monopolies, typically in cities and towns and digging up roads and pavements with little regard to the trees that lined avenues. They have left a patchwork effect instead of being required to reinstate the full width of pavements, giving local residents a benefit for the disruption caused. That may seem a small matter when we are contemplating the future of the super-highway, but it is important for the residents who are affected.

The infrastructure is not touching huge areas of Britain. The American companies regard the rural and sparsely populated parts of Britain as economically much less desirable than towns and cities. In the borders, for example, we are stuck between, to the north, Edinburgh, which is being cabled by United Artists, and, to the south, Newcastle, which is being cabled by United Artists. We are piggy in the middle.

Courtesy of Scottish Telecom, a 64 KB pipe goes through St. Boswells and Coldstream. In order to remain competitive and get access to proper broadband services that would suit the needs of commerce, industry and education, we would need at least a 2 MB fibre-optic cable. We are unlikely to have that, so there is no immediate prospect of the population in the borders having access to that level of infrastructure.

Al Gore is absolutely right. If we are not careful, and if the Government do not get their planning right, we shall end up with a society of information haves and have-nots. There is a great deal of concern in my party, which represents rural areas, many of which are disparately populated, that, if it is left to the market, those areas will never have access to a proper system of infrastructure. If the Minister is about to tell me I am wrong, I shall be delighted.

Mr. Ian Taylor: It is a matter of great concern to many people. In very rural areas, the answer is not necessarily simply to replicate the cabling that is installed in more urban areas. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are now looking very much more at further release of the radio spectrum to provide access to rural areas. I am sure that he will be delighted about that for Scotland, as and when we can announce the next stage.

Mr. Kirkwood: Of course I recognise that a great deal of front-line, leading-edge technological work is being done in radio transmission and communication. I welcome that because it opens up opportunities that rural areas otherwise would not have.

The market will not offer an incentive for companies to move into areas such as south-east Scotland, where there are two or three times as many sheep as there are people and households. The Government are right to say that commercial forces have a part to play, but there must come a time at which the really disparate areas such as the highlands and the south-east and south-west of Scotland and parts of Wales benefit from active positive discrimination by central Government, if it is necessary. If, as a result of this evening's discussion, the Minister could tell me that if all else fails the Government will consider dealing with that problem by plugging that gap, I would be reassured.

BT and Mercury have been crying out for the chance to create a truly national infrastructure and I understand that BT is prepared to put up £15 billion of its own money. As there is no need for taxpayers' money, I do not see what the Government have against that. We are in serious danger of missing an opportunity if we do not allow it to happen.

What should the Government do? First, they should allow BT and Mercury to re-enter the market. Secondly, because of the educational importance of the subject, the Government should commit themselves to a project to link every school, college and library to a national super-highway more widespread than Super-JANET, which has been a brave and relatively successful attempt to link universities. Thirdly, and finally, the Government should provide some guarantee of their commitment to ensuring that rural areas are not left behind.

Some of my hon. Friends, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), would agree with Mr. Newt Gingrich and give everyone on income support a laptop. That is a slightly strange idea in some ways; but at least Newt Gingrich and my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham recognise the importance of such infrastructures to our future, and of motivation, commitment and vision. That is probably the only resemblance between them.

Today's children will need technological skills if they are to obtain jobs. Technology is invading the workplace, and it will invade the home as well. My party has produced a policy that we consider coherent, which is contained in a document entitled "As Far as the Eye Can See". I recommend it to the Government.

I hope that the Minister's response will be positive. I congratulate the Select Committee on a very good report, which has given us an opportunity to engage in an important debate.

4.45 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on his report, and on the interesting debate that has resulted from it. I believe that many people outside will also find the debate interesting.

Perhaps it is a coincidence that the Back-Bench committee that I chair chose today for a demonstration of the Internet, which is to take place in my office at 6 pm. Hon. Members may wish to go to my office—which is at 3 Dean's yard—at that time, or perhaps at 7 pm, when the debate has ended. The demonstration is to take place there because the House is so technologically backward that it is impossible to find a Committee Room in which to hold a demonstration of the Internet.

One Committee Room—Committee Room 15—has an integrated services digital network line. In the past, I have booked that room with the full co-operation of the Serjeant at Arms and, at the last minute, have been told that I must use Committee Room 14, Committee Room

21 or some other room that has no ISDN line. That makes any demonstration of the Internet impossible. The Minister smiles; I am sure that he understands my frustration. I think that many people would like to see what the Internet can do, so I have decided to go ahead with the demonstration—but, as I have said, it will take place in my office rather than in the main building.

My constituency is fortunate, in that it could be described as "wired up". It contains a very good cable company, Cambridge Cable, which has installed fibre-optics throughout the city and is now beginning work on some of the surrounding area in East Anglia. Of course, we also have an excellent university, which has promoted fibre-optic cable and has been one of the main proponents of the JANET and Super-JANET networks. An on-line media experiment is currently being conducted in some homes in the Cambridge area, allowing people to choose educational and video services.

I am conscious, however, that not all my constituents have access to the new technology. I have therefore tried to convene a small group to work in the city, examining ways of providing access for a much wider range of people than those who can afford the modems and computers that they will need in their own homes to gain access to the technology. We have devised an on-line city project, involving city and county councillors and a number of other agencies.

They will consider the provision of information that is socially useful rather than commercially useful. I refer to housing transfer lists, bus timetables, advice on benefits and other information to which ordinary people would like access. We intend to put in a number of installation points in libraries, community centres, schools, shopping centres and the shopping concourse in Addenbrooke's hospital, because those are the sorts of places where we think it best for people to get access to the Internet and the information on it.

This is a continuing experiment, and an important one. It illustrates the principle of universality, which is one of the most important principles that we have to work on. We must ensure that we do not end up with an elite, intellectual group of people who have access to this information via new technology and an underclass deprived of the educational and employment opportunities and other benefits that new technology can bring.

Mr. McWilliam: Bearing in mind the severe weather of the past few weeks and the geography of large parts of this country, does my hon. Friend agree that one of the advantages of the super-highway—teleworking—means that people who are cut off at home because they live in rural areas and cannot come into the cities can work at home and need no longer be cut off?

Mrs. Campbell: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Many people will welcome the prospect of more teleworking, but it has disadvantages too. Many people work for the social contact, so we shall have to wait and see how that aspect resolves itself. There are advantages and disadvantages to working remotely.

I am perhaps one of the few hon. Members to have a large proportion of constituents who are wired up. I reckon that about 20,000 of my 70,000 constituents have access, in one way or another, to the Internet. About 15,000 people are wired up via the university and have access to electronic mail; I estimate that at least another 5,000 who work in high-tech industries and in small consultancies from home have such access too, so it has been easy for me to take advantage of the new technology.

Since I started using electronic mail, I have found that about 10 per cent. of my correspondence comes to me in that form. I must inform the House, however, that that does not give me any more time to read the mail than when it comes the usual way in the form of hard copy.

I have also had the opportunity of taking advantage of some of the news groups. Cambridge is fortunate in having its own news group, where I can post views and receive views publicly from some of my constituents. I am pleased to announce that I now have my own home page. I apologise in advance for the gobbledegook, but my code is: http://www.worldserver.pipex.com/anne.campbell/. I hope that everyone will use it to read up on my career and to peruse my constituency newsletters—not to mention learning about my activities in the House.

I have also taken advantage of electronic mail by becoming the first hon. Member to hold an electronic mail surgery. So far I have held about five of them. They have all been heavily used; there is always a great deal of interest in these events. It is difficult to predict the questions that my constituents will ask by electronic mail at advice surgery times. Some people are puzzled and ask, "Why don't you answer e-mail at any time, instead of only between 5 pm and 6.30 pm on Friday?" I am sure that hon. Members understand that it is not easy to respond quickly to electronic or other mail. At least my constituents know that, at a fixed time every month, I am sitting at my terminal ready to respond to their queries as they arise.

That technology has enormous implications for democracy. Several hon. Members spoke about making *Hansard* available on the Internet, which would be of enormous advantage. Why not make hon. Members' voting records available on the Internet? Why not give constituents the chance to respond to the way in which hon. Members vote or to the remarks that they make? Why not make us more accountable and open to questioning from our constituents?

A few months ago, I asked questions of every Government Department to ascertain the extent to which they were using the Internet and whether or not I could send them e-mail. I know that the Minister has an e-mail address and although I have not taken advantage of that facility yet I am sure that I shall do so.

It would be a great advantage to send to Ministers the sort of e-mail that I receive. I know that I am not allowed to use visual aids in the Chamber, but in waving this piece of paper about, the Minister will appreciate that this is one of seven e-mail messages that I received today, and it is quite lengthy. The only way in which I can provide a copy to a Minister is to produce a printout and a photocopy, attach that to another letter, place them in an envelope and post them.

That is rather tedious and I would rather simply press a button, to pass on e-mail to whichever Minister is destined to receive it—and obtain an answer in the same way that I can post on. My constituents might then ask whether there is any point having a Member of Parliament who just acts as a Minister's post box, and they might start sending their electronic mail to the Minister direct. It is impossible for us to predict future developments and

[Mrs. Campbell]

the way in which they will change our work in the House. However, I am sure that those changes will be far-reaching and profound.

There is a healthy debate in my party at present about the use of encryption on the Internet, which has in turn generated discussion among some news groups. We well understand that some users want their privacy respected, and that others need unforgeable signatures. I am seriously considering that myself because it would be potentially dangerous for someone to be able to forge a Member of Parliament's signature on the Internet. We are beginning to come to terms with such issues and to devise policies, but we need time to form a considered view. I am sure that the debate about encryption will continue.

I want to talk also about the importance of the Internet and the super-highway in education. I was interested to read on the front page of *The Times Educational Supplement* last week about a Department of Trade and Industry project called "Schools on Line". It is expected to cost about £7.5 million and a pilot is to be launched in June in about 60 schools. I gather that the project will link some schools to the Internet through ISDN lines provided by British Telecom.

The project was not entirely news to me because I had heard about it from various contacts in education before I read about it. I understand that when the Secretary of State for Education heard of the DTI's grandiose plans, in the words of my informant she went ballistic because she did not think that this was a good time to put extra money into schools when the Government had been unable to find money to fund the teachers' pay award. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that.

It is obviously desirable, if not essential, to put schools on line as soon as possible. There should not just be one line inside the front door. We must think about how to provide infrastructure in each school so that every classroom can have access to the Internet. Such a project will not be inexpensive: it will require a great deal of resources. I realise, as do all my hon. Friends, that it cannot be done quickly but must be planned and that there must be a strategic framework for seeing how it will develop.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Obviously, I cannot comment on newspaper headlines; the hon. Lady will have to wait for formal announcements. It is important to understand that in working with industry the DTI is obviously keen to encourage industry to produce projects for schools. In that sense, we are reinforcing the Department for Education announcement in January of a £3 million scheme to encourage industry to present ideas. I especially welcome the pledge by the Cable Communications Association to wire up every school in franchise areas with optical fibres.

Mrs. Campbell: I am grateful to the Minister for that information. It is encouraging to know that Ministers are thinking along those lines. However, I am sure that some of my hon. Friends will say later in the debate that the universality principle is just as important in schools as it is in homes. The way forward must be planned, to ensure that people will not be disadvantaged because a cable company does not have a franchise in their area.

The use of the information super-highway in education is a most exciting and forward-looking idea, and it could do a great deal to raise standards in education. It is important for us to get there first, because that will give our children enormous advantages over students in other parts of the world.

I should like to put in a word for two organisations that have been particularly helpful and useful in promoting that kind of education. One is the National Council for Educational Technology. It has pioneered some miraculous and imaginative schemes, which have done a great deal to point the way to raising standards. The other organisation is the BBC, which over the years has set an excellent example in educational broadcasting without which our schools would have been much poorer.

The real challenge for the future is to determine how the BBC can be financed so that it can go on providing that core of educational work, which is vital to schools. In future, the licence fee may not be an appropriate way to do so, because at the moment it covers a television set, and those who do not have sets do not pay the fee. In future those with computers may have to pay the licence fee because two or even three technologies—the computer, the television set and the telephone—may be combined in a single piece of equipment. How to ensure that the BBC continues to be an excellent provider of vital information for our schools and citizens is an exciting challenge.

5.4 pm

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), for reasons that I shall shortly explain. I apologise for not being present for the start of the debate. However, hon. Members may be pleased to know that, thanks to the improvement of communications in the House, I have heard every speech in the debate from the comfort of 1 Parliament street. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on his speech, which dealt with his Committee's report. I am willing to be quizzed by any hon. Member as to whether I heard his speech. The only part of the debate I missed was during the minute that it took me to go from 1 Parliament street to the Chamber.

For reasons that I shall explain, I had not intended to speak in the debate. I decided to do so after hearing hon. Members' speeches, because they prove that this debate is most useful. It has touched off two themes in my mind, which I am keen to put to the House. I welcome what the hon. Member for Cambridge said, because, as chairman of the parliamentary and scientific committee, I can tell her that much of what she said bears on the convergence of technology, which is causing us to look at structures in the Commons and the Lords as we consider how to address our minds to the real technological changes that we face on a personal level.

As chairman of the parliamentary information technology committee and the parliamentary space committee, I can tell the House that we had to address our minds to that. There is also the cable and satellite group. When the Minister replies to the debate, I hope that he will address some of those changes because some aspects of technology and the opportunities for British industry are the themes that I should like to address.

Much of the debate has touched upon the consumer, the user of technology. As I said, the new technologies present opportunities for British industry. In the context of the user, I was pleased to hear so many references to

Internet. Those of us who had opportunities at college, university or elsewhere to see Internet in action appreciate that it has made considerable headway. The hon. Member for Cambridge made that her major theme, and she was right to suggest that it could present opportunities, but also a major challenge.

Over the past 20 years in this place, the growth of contact with Members and the weight of paper upon us have become major problems. Would electronic mail help to solve them, or would it add to them? Will instant access mean that we shall reflect the views of lobbies that are geared to high tech in a way that might lead to staffing implications? That is an open question, but we shall have to address it as more and more hon. Members come to terms with modern technology.

I said that I shall concentrate on the opportunities for British industry. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the way in which he has sought to raise the public profile of information technology in this field. He gave a press conference on earth observations, which touched on aspects of agriculture and on the opportunity for more effective monitoring of the common agricultural policy, an issue that is near to all our hearts. I believe that he has in mind similar sessions with the media in respect of communications and putting the case for our space industry, for which there are major opportunities in Europe and further afield.

I encourage the Minister to say a word or two about raising the profile of what is happening in communications across the broadband network and through satellites. With convergence, Britain's expertise in the field and the prospect of liberalisation within Europe, to which he referred, we should be able in Europe and further afield to take the opportunity to promote British companies that have expertise not only in cable but in satellites. Behind that, it is true that we have a world lead in software. With the coming together of the Government and hon. Members with an interest in the area, there are many opportunities that could be to our national benefit.

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to say a few words on the issue. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will feel able to respond to the points that I have raised—if not now, perhaps in more detail later or in writing if he wants to give the matter further consideration.

The Select Committee report has given us a welcome opportunity to bend our minds to the real challenge of the future, the opportunities for industry and the way in which each and every hon. Member will be working over the next several years.

5.10 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the debate. He is a new Minister, who has been widely spoken of as someone who will take a new and dynamic view.

I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on the Select Committee report that was published in July 1994. It is certainly one of the most interesting and informative reports on a technical subject that I have read for some time.

We heard some detail about the Internet from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). It made me realise that there was more to the discussion that I heard recently on the radio between Pat Kane, who is a pop star but also a graduate looking into the American way of life, and someone at the forefront in the United States who claimed that the Internet is now biological and should have rights written into the constitution.

I realise that it is no substitute for the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge, but on that programme I heard about a marriage that had grown out of contact on the Internet. Perhaps it has more human attributes than one would think. I hope that it is working on a divorce package as well. The marriage may have been made not in heaven, but on the Internet—yet it may still end in the divorce courts.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that one of the advantages of the Internet is that we can be whoever we choose—male or female, old or young, black or white? That has some interesting implications for our democracy.

Mr. Connarty: I know that people reinvent themselves every day in this place, but I had not realised that they also did so on the Internet. My hon. Friend is the chair of the Back-Bench parliamentary Labour party committee on science and technology. I have tried to take an interest in those matters, but she is far ahead of me.

Indeed, I took the trouble to go to Martlesham to see the British Telecommunications experiments. It is clear that there is a future that we have not envisaged if only we allow it to come to us. In my constituency, within a few hundred yards of my home, there is a teleworking cottage in the converted stables of an old house. The great thing about a teleworking cottage, especially in an environment such as Scotland, is that not only can it train people to use computers, but because many jobs can be done across the Internet in various locations close to the company that requires work to be done, it can supply work to people in rural areas.

I am sure that we should be worried about some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge, such as the change in social relationships if we begin to use teleworking, but there are great advantages in teleworking for, for example, a lady in a rural area. If she has no work, her choice is either to leave her rural environment or to find a new medium with which to contact the workplace—and obviously teleworking is one.

I was impressed by the Select Committee report, but I was disappointed by the Government's response, which was published in November, because it appears that, in the main, the Select Committee's recommendations have been rejected. The Government state in paragraph 7:

"the existing regulatory framework based on the 1991 Telecommunications White Paper continues to provide the best framework for"

development. They refer to an evolutionary environment. I do not propose that we go into a revolutionary mode, especially as the Labour party has changed clause IV, but I think that there are many reasons to be worried about keeping to the path that the Government are on.

Paragraph 7(b) states:

"the new local delivery franchises for broadcasting services should continue to be awarded on an exclusive basis".

[Mr. Connarty]

There is a danger that we shall end up with what was warned of in the Select Committee report, which is local monopolies becoming entrenched, rather than the sort of development that we need to face the potential challenge of the super-highway.

It is clear that the liberalisation of 1984 has had benefits. There are 125 cable franchises covering two thirds of the population—or rather, they pass two thirds of the population. As we have heard, although 3 million households are passed, only 650,000 are connected—only 21.5 per cent. I was surprised to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central say that that is the same percentage as for 1992, so progress seems to have been frozen.

Another interesting point is the 15 per cent. increase in telephones in households. No doubt that is aided by the cable companies offering telephony as well as entertainment services. I have read enough to know a little of what my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) said about local networks being only copper in many cases, not optical fibre. The aspiration—indeed, the prerequisite—for the sort of super-highway that we are supposed to be discussing tonight is that there should be optical fibre and, possibly, radio at the end of it to give us the broadband, two-way communication required.

I note that the national grid is to have another national network of optics across the grid. Fibreway, a company mainly owned by GPT Ltd., plans a national network along canalways. There will be a number of fibre optic national networks, but they will not necessarily reach what should be the final user. As the Select Committee said in its report, the railways will probably be another alternative for running an optical fibre network. The problem is that that would then link with a series of local networks of a much lower quality, which basically would have been put in simply to get a quick return from selling broadcasting services.

British Telecom and Mercury are locked out of entertainment provision. One of the major concerns of the Select Committee was that without their being allowed access, they cannot get into the broadcast income stream, so they cannot justify the sort of investment required to go from national to local.

Mr. Ian Taylor: On one specific point, it must be clear that BT and Mercury are allowed to do anything they wish, in an interactive sense, with any household in the country. In other words, that is a national possibility. Equally, they are allowed to bid for the new local delivery operators, using their existing infrastructure—again for taking entertainment, and in this case simultaneous entertainment, if they wish to bid. In both those circumstances, the policies that I set out in our response are an advance and show that, although the interactive aspect of BT has been there from the beginning, there are signs that there is competition, and therefore great potential for BT in that market.

Mr. Connarty: I had intended to deal with the point that the Minister made. I do not think that he is telling us that, at this moment, BT could put entertainment down the line nationally to sell to people in their homes. The 20 million telephone customers cannot suddenly be accessed for interactive or broadcast purposes nationally. I picked up that matter in what the Government said.

In fact, BT had six franchises, but it gave up five of them and retained an interest only in Westminster. The reason was that BT did not feel that that was compatible with its aspiration to develop a national two-way broadband network. The present regulations—or restrictions—have created local, not national, and narrow, not broadband, networks.

I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge said about the quality of the Cambridge network. I am sure that it will fit in nicely with a national network, but it is probably one of the few that will. The point is that they will not be able to be stapled together.

That is my problem, coming at the issue very much from a lay person's viewpoint, and looking at what has been created—a series of local network loops that need to be stapled together to make a national network. But there is no main player willing to put the quality all the way down the line and to ensure that the network is put together. I do not know how the network loops can be stapled together to make a national network. Therefore, we may make a super-highway, but there will not be many turning-on points for the community and for users.

The Government's comment about public telecommunications operators was interesting. Paragraph 44 of the Command Paper states, as the Minister argued earlier:

"there is no asymmetry in the regulatory framework".

He argued that BT had chosen to dispose of its cable franchises, but that BT and Mercury were able to act as agents for franchisees or to bid for franchises in local areas. It is worth noting that Mercury has 28 local cable franchises. As has been said before, it is owned by Cable and Wireless. That means that it is 80 per cent. owned by an American company.

No PTO can transmit entertainment nationally. On page 33 of the Select Committee's July report, BT said that, if it could transmit entertainment, broadcast services could eventually have

"such a significant impact on the economics [of broadcast networks] that their provision would allow voice telephony to be offered at marginal cost."

That is an attractive prospect. It reminds me of the vision of "atoms for peace" that was discussed when I was a young boy. It did not come off in that industry.

BT seems to be saying that the main driving force behind its early development will become marginal compared with the fantastic and fascinating services that can be offered. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon made that point. The most important thing is not the infrastructure, but the services that it will carry, yet the Government seem to be locked into regulations. They are worried about the development of the infrastructure when they should look to the future and focus on the services.

People keep talking about the United States' involvement in cable companies. I was interested to note that United States companies have 67 per cent. of the cable market, that Canadian companies have 19 per cent., and that French companies have 5 per cent., leaving United Kingdom companies with only 5 per cent. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that the UK is the only country that allows telephony to be put down cable at the same time as broadcasts. All the advantages seem to be with the companies that will undermine the strength of

our bigger companies, especially BT, which should be a lead company, with all advantages given. The policy is not sensible.

As a lay person, I find it freakish that the Government should forbid the 20 million plus customers of the PTOs to get on to the highest technology, the super-highway and the Internet. The Minister said that the intention is to consider the use of wavebands and radio in sparsely populated regions. The map on page 19 of the Select Committee report shows a small, fragmented area of black, which denotes the cable franchises in Scotland, plus only a little line around Aberdeen.

That is where the economic argument will come in. We might get the radio bands, but unless the project is supported by the Government or taken up by a company such as BT, which is big enough to take on extra infrastructure costs—as part of the public service return for the cash that it will receive from investment—I do not know how it can be done. No small, local cherry-picking cable companies could undertake such a project.

We have talked about the regulations, but a strong argument is advanced on page 46 of the report that there might be a single regulator. In the future, we shall have not cable, wireless or telephone companies, but a single stream of digital information, which will be in many forms as it is translated and transposed for use by the consumer and by companies. There is a strong argument for bringing together the Office of Telecommunications and the Independent Television Commission, to consider whether there should be one regulator. I note that the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of National Heritage have regulatory roles as well. We need to get ourselves into the right mode and deal with who will regulate, rather than just with what the regulations will be.

My final thoughts are simple and possibly naive. They deal with what people at the other end of broadcasts may be thinking. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge explained the Internet. When television was first invented, it probably frightened off anyone who wished to buy a television, but it is now so commonplace in our homes that people do not see it; it is only a decoding machine, picking up signals practically from the ether. It has become simple to operate, but that does not mean that it is a simple device.

I hope that, in making our decisions on the super-highway, we realise that we should have something that the end user will use. It should not be used just to put down pulp films. It must be a simple device that allows people to extract and receive all the aspects of the information revolution that are coming. It is clear that, if all people participate, the country, the economy and our ability to survive in the world will grow. Many people will be left out if an all-access interchange on the super-highway is not achieved.

I must admit that, although I am fascinated by Internet explanations and I have a modem that allows me to get on to it, I am put off by the complexity of getting in and by other matters that were explained by the hon. Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall). I am put off by the fact that what comes out of it might engulf me, and I would not be able to cope with it. That is the worry of people in the home and in business. We must consider the interfaces and the end points as well as the highway as we develop it.

5.26 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): I apologise for being unable to attend the beginning of the debate. I declare an interest in the cable industry. I have the privilege of claiming to be the oldest living inhabitant of the British cable industry. I was persuaded by the visions of my then right hon. Friends in 1981-82. I believed that, as the phrase was then, the cabling of Britain was the future. I was co-founder of a company that subsequently became the Cable Corporation, of which I have the honour to be chairman.

Our vision in 1981-82 was flawed, because, as it turned out, it was not possible to create a cable television industry in this country until the telecommunications structure was liberalised. That transformed the panorama in such a way that this country has made unparalleled progress and is, incomparably, the leader in the field. Although some leaders in the rest of the world have discovered the communications super-highway—the Vice-President of the United States, the Japanese and the Germans talk about it—we have been plodding along heavily and with great financial difficulty, and doing it.

The statistics have already been given to the House about the number of kilometres we have, the number of homes passed, and the billions of pounds that have already been spent. We are a long way down the road, and far further towards a super-highway than any other country.

The Government have not been given enough credit for that foresight, with the honourable exception of my hon. Friend the Minister. Ministers do not take enough credit for what they have achieved. I pay credit to my hon. Friend, who has been a shot in the arm to this exciting industry.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Government and this country are so far ahead, why, in chapter 2 of their Command Paper in November of last year, did the Government say:

"The full scope of the opportunities offered by the convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and information technology is only now becoming clear"?

The Government have only just woken up.

Mr. Whitney: No. These questions are entirely relative, and have to do with the development of modern technology. A great deal is only now becoming clear. I mentioned Vice-President Al Gore a moment ago—it has become clear to his scriptwriters but, meanwhile, we have on the ground miles and miles of fibre-optic interactive network.

I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should cavil. This should not be a cross-party battle. We should for once all recognise that Britain happens to be ahead. It is sad that the hon. Gentleman feels it necessary to take such a carping approach.

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman is being a little economical with the truth, and giving a rather narrow reading of history. I am not making a party political point, but will he accept that the vast investment that went into British Telecom and the British communications industry occurred when it was in the public sector?

I do not wish to detract from British Telecom—it is a first-class company, a global player. It wants to invest £15 billion to £20 billion—that is the offer that Iain Vallance

[Mr. Caborn]

made the Government, but it has been turned down because the regulatory system, which was correct in its infancy, is no longer correct, because circumstances have changed. We are not moving with the times: that was the fundamental argument in the Select Committee's report.

Mr. Whitney: I know it was; I had the privilege of reading the report. Although he did not recognise the point in his intervention, I know that the hon. Gentleman understands that British Telecom had the opportunity afforded by the cable revolution. It had six franchises of its own, but opted out and walked away from them. I feel no ill will towards British Telecom. If it wishes to spend £15 billion in the future, let it do so. Although it is behind the eight ball, it is being slow. Billions of pounds have already been spent.

I am the first to wish that more of the investment in the industry was British. When we formed our company, the great majority of investors were British, but—I am sure hon. Members are acquainted with this sad phenomenon—the relative short-termism of British finance meant that it was a long haul. Many people invested as, let us say, venture capitalists, and thought that they would be involved for three years and then get out. That, however, is not the nature of this industry.

My company has been spending money for 12 years, and only last year became cash-positive. There cannot be many big industries where that sort of time scale is acceptable, so we have to give credit to the investors, whether they be American, Canadian, French or British, and recognise what they have done and are doing. They are creating a fibre-optic network for this country, at no cost to the taxpayer. That was the vision of the Government and the Department of Trade and Industry way back in 1981-82. It has been realised.

I hope that British capital will come back as the industry matures. The financial institutions have been pretty slow on the uptake, and slow to understand the potential. It is now being understood, and I am optimistic that British capital will come back to an exciting and important national industry.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) is no longer in his place but I wish to pick up a point that he made. He referred to the national network and the unsatisfactory stapling together of local networks. I hope that I can bring him good cheer, because that is happening very effectively.

There is in place something called the London Interconnect, which essentially joins the M25 area and beyond—from Berkshire to Essex—by means of fibre-optic connections. The quality is excellent, as good as anyone could wish for in this advanced stage of the technology. Plans are already well advanced to link region to region so that we have a fibre-optic national grid—again, at no cost to the taxpayer.

The Minister has already explained the opportunities available to British Telecom. From my experience with my cable company, I can testify to the fact that British Telecom's service improved out of all recognition virtually overnight, and the winner is the consumer.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman referred to the deployment of optical fibre by the cable companies. I acknowledge his point, but will he confirm that there is almost no deployment of optical fibre by those companies in customers' homes? Does he share my concern that that is where we are falling behind?

Mr. Whitney: It is true that there is a technical problem with the last drop, but I am confident that, in the next year or two, the last drop connection and a great many other interactive services will appear. The hon. Gentleman's intervention brings me to my next point.

Progress has, of course, been much slower than many of us would have wished, and certainly slower than the cable companies would have wished. They have a strong interest in getting the network in place quickly, so that they can earn revenue. There have been a range of tax changes, with which I shall not bore the House and with which many hon. Members are probably familiar, but that caravan is now rolling fast. Over the next year or two, I believe—in fact, I know—that there will be a range of new interactive services that will develop much more rapidly than they have so far, and more rapidly than seems likely in any other country.

Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall), there are great opportunities for British industry. I hope that large and small technical industries are fully alerted to those opportunities and to the challenge.

There are two further opportunities for Britain. The first concerns investment, and the second involves the provision of all the technology that the industry will need. Fundamentally, there is a terrific opportunity for British consumers and British business. Businesses in my area are happy to have BT and our local cable company supplying telephony services. Everyone benefits—as, for example, with the schools initiative.

I emphasise that this has been a success story. British Telecom has been given opportunities in the past and has great opportunities for the future. The structure created 10 or 12 years ago has not only stood the test of time but shown that it is capable of developing to the very great benefit of this country. We should rejoice in that fact.

Mr. Connarty: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I must apologise to the House. When I spoke earlier, I did not declare an interest. I was previously sponsored by the Union of Communication Workers, representing postal workers, which has amalgamated with the National Communication Union, which works in the telecom industry and is now called the Communication Workers Union. Had I not been sponsored by a union, however, I would not have changed what I said.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I thank the hon. Member for his courtesy in rectifying the omission.

Sir Michael Marshall: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am prompted to say that I should have declared an interest in my speech since I am an adviser to Cable and Wireless.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

5.39 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I am pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to this important debate. Many people like myself do not fully understand the complexities of the new technology, especially

broadband. It was, however, explained to me that optical fibres were like a man or a woman flashing down a dark hole a torch carrying millions of Morse messages per second, and that each flash had multiple purposes. I am grateful for that explanation. I now understand. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Caborn: What was the message?

Ms Coffey: What is the message? That is the question. Although I may not understand the exact technicalities, I understand that we are facing an enormous revolution in our working, leisure and even shopping practices, with all the involved possibilities for social change, and all the unpredictable consequences of it.

As the hon. Member who represents Stockport, which is in the heart of the north-west, I am all too aware that Stockport was at the heart of the original industrial revolution. One can still see the remains of that revolution in Stockport; the great cotton and engineering mills which are now empty. I shall refrain, however, from making any party political point. It is clear that that industrial revolution is over, but it has left a legacy of bitterness and anger. In its wake, the first industrial revolution brought wealth to some, and poverty, misery and oppression to others. As a society, we are still suffering the consequences.

Looking to the future, and to the second industrial revolution that will occur through this new technology, like many hon. Members, I think that we would be very foolish to let history repeat itself. The new technology gives us all a chance to give genuine equal opportunity to all members of our society. That is why I think that universal access to the services which have yet to be developed must be at the heart of the debate.

Nobody can second-guess what those services may or may not be and which of them will be successful. Will tele-shopping take off? Will tele-working take off? How many people will take advantage of videophones? Nobody knows about future services, but we know about the availability of the present infrastructure. Ensuring universal access to that infrastructure would lay the basis for ensuring universal access to the services which have yet to be delivered.

NYNEX Cablecomms is cabling Stockport, and I have had the usual complaints about sub-contractors digging up things that they should not and tree roots being threatened. I must say, however, that NYNEX has always been very helpful in my communications with it, and it has also contributed to the community by providing grants to local groups and to the local football team, Stockport County, which is in need of some help. I have not managed, however, to get from NYNEX—this is absolutely crucial—a commitment to cable every school in my constituency.

I welcomed the announcement last week by the Cable Communications Association to give a standard free link up for every school passed by, but it has not given a commitment to pass by every school. That commitment to a free link, therefore, is meaningless to ensuring universal access unless every school is linked. Any school outside that network, should broadband be needed in future to deliver services, would be seriously disadvantaged.

I strongly and passionately believe that the technology which is being developed is a means of ensuring that every child in every education authority is offered the same opportunity. For example, because of the way in which schools are funded, more pupils means more money for the school. The more money schools get, the more teachers they can employ, and the more specialist teachers they can employ.

If there were a link between schools, it would be possible for every school in a borough to take advantage of a specialist music lesson and to give all children equal access, irrespective of the school that they attended. I passionately believe that in this technology there is enormous potential to ensure equal educational access for all children.

A difficulty arises because there is already a telecommunications network. Although I welcome BT's offer to come to Stockport to discuss the projects that it is already implementing in rural areas, which sound very exciting, I cannot second-guess whether the existing telecommunications system will be able to take the available services in future, or whether a broadband infrastructure will be needed.

The Minister will be aware of my concern, because, when he came to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and showed what I thought was an admirable commitment to universal access in principle, I raised the matter with him. I ask him, therefore, to make it quite clear that it is not good enough for the Cable Communications Association to offer a free standard link. It must commit itself to link up every school if universal access is to mean anything. If the association makes that commitment, it would make a really positive contribution to the community, which would be greatly welcomed.

On a slightly different issue, the Minister is probably aware that there is much concern about the kind of films and other material which goes out on television—although it is, of course, subject to control. I believe that what consenting adults do, or what consenting adults watch other consenting adults do, is a matter for adults. The difficulty is that children may sometimes have access to such material or may be involved in the making of it, which is not acceptable to many of us. This is a difficult issue, because it is not easy to control material on the Internet. The issue needs to be not only addressed by the Government but raised at a G7 summit.

It would be helpful if, in responding to the debate, the Minister could say what progress has been made, or indicate how he thinks we could ensure that, given that individuals have the right to watch what they like, we can protect young children from being exposed to such material and being used in it. We must ensure that there is not a market for the use of children in making pornographic material for adults to view. I would be grateful for his response.

5.47 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I shall undertake not to speak for quite as long as I did last night, because I know that at least one other hon. Member wants to speak. I speak as a member of the Select Committee on Information. Like the Minister, I feel that I am occasionally attacked by hon. Members. I plead not guilty, as I cannot be responsible for the sins of my forefathers.

Several important things are happening in the House. Hon. Members will have noticed a response to a parliamentary question that I tabled a couple of days ago.

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

notifying the House of the merger of some of the departmental responsibilities as a result of new technology. We are now experimenting seriously with getting *Hansard* on line. A new tool called Cello is now available to provide a very detailed and rapid search of Members' speeches within minutes of them making those speeches. Thanks to the co-operation between the staff of *Hansard*, the Library and the Computer Office, and the merging of technologies between Departments, important developments are being made. The latest is a hypertext search facility, which will be an extremely powerful tool for all hon. Members.

Mention has been made of the importance of getting House documents on to the Internet. If the Government and the House really believe in open government, they must, by definition, place documents on the Internet.

I understand—this somewhat pre-empts the first sentence of the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn)—that the Finance and Services Committee discussed a proposal last night from the Information Committee to start linking the House on the Internet. That is a wonderful step in the right direction.

The only thing that worries me is that, given some of the points that have been made, and the admission by the hon. Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall) that he was watching this debate outside this place, we will end up with a virtual Parliament. Some hon. Members may think that that is a good idea, as we can run businesses in this virtual economy. However, some of our constituents might think that we should spend more time in the Chamber dealing with the important things in life.

Sir Michael Marshall: The hon. Gentleman has identified a genuine problem. He must appreciate that, in certain situations, it is very easy to sign one's mail while listening to a debate. It becomes even more tempting to turn the volume down for some colleagues and to turn it up for others.

Mr. Miller: Indeed—and I have listened to some of the hon. Gentleman's speeches before.

I want to take a brief trip around the world. A couple of weeks ago, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) and the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), in his capacity as chairman of the British-American parliamentary group, and I were involved in a video link with Tom Foley, the former Speaker of Congress. Such links are steps in the right direction, and they are steps which the House should be taking.

A couple of weekends ago, while I was at home, I introduced a friend of mine to the Internet. At the time, I was logged on to a database in the university of Iowa, in respect of a project with which the Science and Technology Select Committee is involved. My friend did not really believe that I was actually logged into a place so far away. I asked him what he would like to see, and he asked for something about South Africa.

Within minutes, I was able to show him, in real time, information from the African National Congress about the resolution of an industrial dispute. That matter would never have made it into the British media. That is a incredibly powerful demonstration of the direction in which the technology will take us. It will provide information that people would otherwise not be able to access.

There have been exciting developments in my home area of the north-west of England. A project has been approved in collaboration with five other European regions, funded by the European Union, to link the regions on an experimental basis for a five-year pilot study. That kind of development will radically impact on distance learning, and in particular on language learning, and on the exchange of technical and cultural information.

The north-west has industrial strengths which we can exploit. Reference has already been made to GPT. A great deal of original ISDN—integrated services data network—technology was researched in GPT in Liverpool when it was the old Plessey company. We must exploit that technology to its fullest potential.

Other major manufacturers in the north-west, particularly companies which have historically been involved in defence communications equipment, can provide an enormously powerful base for the future of those technologies, particularly when we consider the need to develop cryptographic techniques on the Internet to deal with some of the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell).

I would not deny that the cable companies are performing a particularly useful job. I will refer to the asymmetry implications in a moment. However, the companies should look around them, and see what other companies are doing in terms of providing infrastructure support to households, industries, schools and colleges.

The cable companies could do very simple things. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who declared an interest, is not here now, because I am referring to the company he mentioned. If the cable companies simply required their contractors to operate under the rules of BS 5750, we would not hear complaints like those we have heard from Stockport and Salford about the activities of that operation.

Perhaps the Minister will address that point when he replies to the debate. Perhaps he will send a very strong message to the cable companies to the effect that the House expects contractors who are opening the doors to huge sums of money for their own benefit to restore our streets and grass verges properly when they undertake that work.

On 28 February, I presented a paper to an industrial conference organised by Brunel university. A Conservative party representative was invited, but one was not sent. Several important issues were discussed at that conference. I commend to the House the paper entitled "Internet Futures", which was written by Jeremy Barnes, Jon Chalmers and Ian Pearson of the BT laboratories in Martlesham. I am aware that the Minister has a high regard for the work of the scientists at Martlesham.

That paper contains an interesting sentence, which I believe encapsulates the issues that we are dealing with:

"It can be argued that the development of optical fibre is commoditising bandwidth and hence driving the Information Revolution just as the steam engine drove the Industrial Revolution."

That simple sentence, despite the very convoluted word in the middle, typifies the power of the technology at our disposal.

The House should congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central and the Trade and Industry Select Committee on their report. Their recommendations represent a powerful way forward. They have come up with a novel solution to the issue of asymmetry which will assist the cable companies and BT. It would be extremely helpful if the Government could say when they are going to adopt the recommendations.

The Select Committee report will provide us with a way towards universal access—a point raised by several hon. Members today. It will provide us with the basis for proper competition. It will also help our country to redevelop its industrial base.

In an early intervention, the Minister referred to radio wavelengths. When he replies, I hope that he will clarify what he means. I believe that he and I are—if I can use the awful pun—on the same wavelength in terms of the need to consider the technologies in their entirety. Radio, cable and twisted pair are necessary. Some of the technologies around twisted pair, like ISDN, will help solve some of the problems. However, radio will also be important.

In an earlier response, the Minister said that discussions were taking place about radio wavelengths. The cable companies tell us that they have a particular problem in this country about the area of the spectrum between zero to 4 GHz.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Everybody does.

Mr. Miller: Yes, and that is a problem, but it is one that other countries have tackled positively.

The Ministry of Defence largely dominates the distribution of that part of the spectrum. We must consider whether we need to keep that part in its hands, given the collaboration that is taking place across European frontiers and among NATO countries on other forms of communication inside the defence world. With some lateral thinking, it might be possible to release a part of that spectrum.

This debate can get very technical, but it is about one basic thing—people. It is a debate about how we best provide a proper basis for information exchange for the people of this nation. Yes, it is about entertainment, as some hon. Members said, and that is an important part. Yes, it is about improving education provision within schools, colleges and our workplaces. It is also about a new definition of work, with all the implications that that has. It is an exciting technology, and we should not miss out on exploiting it to the full.

While there is bound to be the odd, overtly political exchange, the simple fact is that, if the House is serious about providing the best for our citizens, we must take on board all the potential of this technology, as well as recognising that, on occasions, there are some dangers with confidentiality, pornography and so forth. The technology is there for everyone, and it should be made available to every citizen in our nation.

6.3 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) for allowing me some time. I hope that the House will understand that I was unable to attend the earlier part of the debate due to a meeting of the Select Committee on Social Security and the investigation that it is carrying on.

I must declare a non-pecuniary interest, as I am involved in a charity in my constituency, which I was instrumental in setting up, designed to enable schools there to set up connections to the Internet and to develop electronic mail connections. To that effect, we have developed an exchange between schools in my constituency and in the district of Congressman Tim Petri in Wisconsin, in the United States of America. To date, more than 200 electronic mail letters have been exchanged between the schools. I hope that that will develop in an exciting way, although it will probably be slightly unpredictable. Pace Modems has supported that project and I probably ought to include it in the declaration of interest. It is a British company, and it has given at least one free modem to a school in my constituency.

Interestingly, the main point about the debate is that there is excitement on both sides of the House about the technology. It is enormously exciting. Clearly, as was said on the "Today" programme this morning—in a slightly different context, although it is none the less relevant to this debate—a new industrial revolution is taking place. The information technology revolution will transform the way in which we approach work, leisure, politics, government and virtually every other aspect of our lives. It is inconceivable that many of the things we do today will be done in the same way in 50 years, but it is also likely that they will not be done in the same way in as little as five or even 10 years. An enormous transformation in almost every human activity and the way in which we go about it will be provided by the information age.

In many areas, we do not have information at our finger tips, but the information age will literally put information there. It will be available at underground stations, in people's homes and places of work and in public buildings. There will be public access all over the country in all sorts of buildings, as well as in our schools and educational institutions.

It is not a technology solely for young people. Indeed, one of the constituents who sends me electronic mail is a pensioner. In one of his e-mail letters he said, "Mr. Shaw, I just wish this technology had existed in my day." As far as I know, he is still alive and he was certainly alive at the other end of the computer, but he is enjoying being on the Internet and sending e-mail to such an extent that he has signed up with not just one service provider but two. Clearly, that is the way in which many people of all ages will approach it—they will find it fascinating and it offers a tremendous opportunity to expand their knowledge and interest.

The Government's policy is right. We are deregulating where regulations exist and we are avoiding further regulation. That will encourage developments considerably. British software and hardware companies will come into the market, where they are not already there, although in many areas Britain is doing well and taking the lead.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston referred to a visit around the world, and I would go along with that. On my experiences on the Internet, I enjoy looking at the UK Government's World Wide Web server, which is constantly being developed. I am pleased to be able to say that my hon. Friend the Minister recently posted his speech and his Group of Seven conference attendance.

[Mr. David Shaw]

I am also delighted that one can monitor other Governments on line. I find it interesting to look on line. I can pop into the Japanese Prime Minister's office from my constituency home and have a look at what he has been saying recently. I can pop into the House of Representatives about half a minute later and have a look at what is going on in the United States Parliament while at the same time keeping tabs on some aspects of Washington life in terms of what Government decisions are being taken there.

The ability to do all this for the price of a local telephone call—

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Who is paying for all this?

Mr. Shaw: Clearly, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Private Secretary needs to understand a little more about how this operates. I pay for it—for the price of a local call on a Sunday. The service provider is in London, and one has access from there to anywhere. On a Sunday afternoon, one can dial up the headquarters of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in the United States and download a photograph of a US satellite or a shuttle programme. I have looked at the Central Intelligence Agency, which has a home page on the World Wide Web. One can find out all about spy craft and how American spies operated. One can also go for a quick tour of newspapers from St. Petersburg in Russia, *Der Spiegel*, and Italian newspapers, to the Palo Alto newspaper in San Francisco.

Knowledge is available now on the Internet. The World Wide Web, which was developed with British money in Geneva—we should never forget that British Government support helped that—has helped our developments. I should also pay tribute to the Government for their support for Super-JANET—not you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the Super-JANET that has helped the United Kingdom's academic network to get under way.

There are many exciting developments in the United Kingdom and many opportunities for people all over the world to gain information, and for us to gain information that is relevant to our work in the House. What the Government are doing should be supported and encouraged. I hope that there will be further developments soon.

In conclusion, what is happening is enormously exciting and will transform our lives. I have been lobbied on political issues from New Zealand, Czechoslovakia, Belgium and the United States. I expect that we shall all become true citizens of the world, and not merely of the United Kingdom. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments about further developments.

6.8 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): I have a confession to make. I am not on the Internet, and I have no intention of going on the Internet. None of my constituents appears to be on the Internet, because none of them seeks to send me any electronic mail. As the political speeches made in this place are so boring, the idea of reading speeches from other parts of the world frankly fills me with horror.

First, I welcome the report and also the chance to debate it in the Chamber. I pay tribute to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Trade and Technology's personal enthusiasm for the information super-highway, in marked contrast with most of his senior colleagues in the Government. We need action, rather than warm words.

I wish to refer briefly to the speeches of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), and my hon. Friends the Members for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), for Falkirk, West (Mr. Connarty), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) and for Stockton.

Ms Coffey: Stockport.

Dr. Moonie: My apologies to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey)—the "Stocks" are difficult to distinguish.

All Members would agree that this has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's summing up. As regards the content of the report, I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn)—whom I missed out of my list—that I agree with its general thrust, although I may well disagree with some points of detail.

My personal experiences of electronic communication are relatively limited. I had a box on a thing called Telecom Gold a few years ago, but unfortunately I lost the bit of paper on which my identifying number was pasted. I was never able to find it again, and eventually it fell into disuse. My only other direct connection with electronic information came when my annunciator went on fire two weeks ago. Clearly, I am an ill-fated player in the game of communications.

I wish to read to the House two passages from a recent report by SRI International called "Digital Video in Advanced Multimedia". The first states:

"The information superhighway is a myth created by media hyperbole. It is too vague and ill-defined a concept on which to set investment plans and national policy. It suggests that a single all-encompassing network will provide users with broadband access when in reality the 'highway' will consist of many networks with varying capabilities and services that link together".

The second states:

"The notion that the computer, television, video-game and telecommunications industries are likely to merge into one gigantic full-service entity has no support and much evidence to suggest that the industries will continue to remain separate".

That report was produced in the past couple of years at a cost of several million dollars, and it behoves us to take a close interest in it. It provides a down-to-earth view of where we are at present, and where we are likely to be going in the immediate future.

Mr. Whitney: Is the report based solely on American experience?

Dr. Moonie: The report costs about £900 and, I regret to say, I cannot yet afford to buy it. I have only seen the summary, although I am hoping to wangle it out of somebody in the near future. I may then be able to give the hon. Gentleman a more informed answer.

The basic analysis of the report is correct in that we as policy-makers are inclined to develop too rosy a view of what future technology may bring. However, the development of the super-highway and the important industries which surround it should not be left to market

forces alone. This is one area where the Government can do many things to foster industry. Politicians must also consider social issues such as access to the system, and social effects which any major changes in working and consumer patterns may bring. These matters are important, but they remain largely under-developed at present.

What is meant by the information super-highway? While SRI International is right in stating that it is a vague and ill-defined concept, it is possible to have a stab at it. For example, the Internet is not an information super-highway, as anyone who has used it will agree. While it is becoming popular commercially, the majority would perhaps see it as a network of country lanes. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) referred to the cost of a telephone call on a Sunday afternoon, and that was apposite. That is an exact parallel with the Internet, along which one can amble while admiring the view every so often. The Internet is important because it demonstrates that there is a demand for the services on any super-highway that is ultimately developed.

The information super-highway is also not the delivery of 32 channel television services to all homes. Nor is it simply putting television and telephone services down the same pieces of wire or fibre. It may be a mixture of services, and include others for education, work, leisure, health, shopping or whatever people want. It is a system with relatively easy access to the great majority of individuals in society, and it mixes public service with private enterprise to allow us to gain the maximum economic and social returns.

In technological terms, it is the delivery of services on demand and interactively through a mixture of optical fibre, copper wire—twisted pair or coaxial—and digital radio transmission. The last of those is very important, and I trust that the Minister will spend some time on that during his speech. It is becoming an acute problem, as operators look to develop an end loop for users in remote areas.

The Labour party has stated that we will review the asymmetry regulations with a view to allowing BT to enter the broadcast entertainment market, and we will do that at a specified time—assuming, as I confidently predict, that there will be a Labour Government shortly. That date has yet to be decided because of certain technical and financial complexities. Our action will unleash the ability of British Telecom to raise the necessary capital to install its new infrastructure.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the Select Committee's advice in that respect, but perhaps it has been too restrictive. Cable companies have been slow to achieve a cash return for their investment, and many are not yet in that position. It would be most unfair to expect companies to face competition at a time when they are carrying a heavy burden of servicing debt with no cash stream to support it. Any system must take that into account.

Mr. Caborn: If hon. Members read the report carefully, they will see that we also put a series of safety valves into the recommendation. There would be a right to appeal where difficulties such as revenue flow could be taken into account. There could be other problems as the franchise licence unfolds during the seven years. We were clear about giving a target date for the firms, and if they were making unreasonable demands they could face a penalty, which would be competition. I thought that the object of the exercise was to make sure that firms were opened up to competition; that is why we said that the over-franchising on a rolling programme is the answer.

Dr. Moonie: I accept that the emphasis is on removing the asymmetry, rather than on the safeguards. I am just restating for the record that we are conscious of the need for safeguards and that companies will be allowed to make a decent return on their investments before facing competition from a national network. We must not forget that the national provider has a considerable advantage over local companies.

Any future regulatory regime must preserve competition in long distance and local services, and must also ensure that there is a real choice for the consumer over as wide an area as possible without unnecessary duplication. The key to any effective long-term strategy for information super-highways is that we are talking about consumer choice and that we are empowering individuals. We are not empowering News International, NYNEX, the BBC, British Telecom or any other provider to tell people what they can watch in their own homes. They can put a box on their television or computer and they can choose, without restriction, from everything that is available to watch. There is wide agreement on both sides of the House that we must ensure that consumers and individuals are empowered, and not the providers of services.

Another important area for the Government to consider is the present state of anti-competition law in this country. There are grounds for saying that we should perhaps be considering strengthening the laws on competition, not to provide another stick to beat companies' backs but in the hope of being able to proceed with lighter regulations in the future. If the legal framework is stronger, the framework for regulation can in turn be lighter. That is the view of the Director General of Oftel and I support it.

Cable companies pay for the use of long-distance and local networks of other operators, including BT, through interconnection agreements. If BT is allowed to compete for the delivery of entertainment services locally, why should it then be entitled to dig up our streets again? I live in a small, relatively quiet constituency in Scotland—Kirkcaldy—which has the good fortune to have been completely cabled.

I say to my hon. Friends who have complained about their experiences that mine has been relatively benign. The cable companies broke a few water mains every now and then, including one outside my door, and managed to dig up one of the telephone lines in my area, but I had remarkably few complaints and the exercise in now complete. I would receive an awful lot of complaints from my constituents if BT dug up all the streets again to lay another network in the local loop.

Just as we pay for interconnection agreements on the long-distance loop and have common carrier obligations, that may be necessary in areas where BT cannot readily install an alternative network. Where it can do so, I have no objection, although it may be a waste of money and cheaper to impose a common carrier obligation on the provider of the local loop. Once broadband services are available, however, it becomes immaterial, because the loop can carry any volume of traffic that one wishes to send down it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Wycombe pulls a face about that, but it seems to be the

[Dr. Moonie]

logical choice. Companies have a common carrier obligation, so I see no reason on grounds of competition why a common carrier obligation could not be employed in the local loop.

Mr. Whitney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Moonie: I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way.

If I pick up a telephone here in the House of Commons, the exchange decides whether to connect my call through BT, Mercury or the Government telecommunications network. It is invisible to me as a user. If, at home, I wish to view a television channel or buy from a home shopping service, why should I care whose infrastructure I use? However, I do not want two separate lines coming into my house, and I certainly do not want my streets dug up again. That general view has been expressed to me by constituents who have asked about that point.

We often talk about broadband services and the possibilities that they can open up, but those services must be demand-led rather than technology-pushed. Experience of users of new multi-media services shows that at present there is little demand. The Rochester, USA, trial reported in *The Economist* a couple of weeks ago is a good example of that. So there is no guarantee that the services being developed will be taken up until people really want to use them. People will not pay for them unless the demand is created.

Cable companies have been relatively successful in acquiring subscribers, but they have certainly not developed an overwhelming desire among the population for their services. The search is still on for the killer applications—those that will make the difference—and who can say what they will be? I certainly cannot. Cable companies have also had the luxury of bidding for franchises in areas where they see the most market potential. That has by no means given us a broadband national network, nor will it when the next strand of licences is produced. At best, 80 per cent. of homes in the country will have access, and there is no guarantee that BT would go further than that.

I put that question directly to Sir Iain Vallance, who made the point clearly. BT will not cable up every home in the country, whether it is given immediate access to broadband services or not, so we must look at other ways of doing that. It will not be done entirely by fibre-optic cable. Radio is important for remote areas. Like it or not, we shall end up with a patchwork quilt of services that are interconnected. There is nothing wrong with that, provided that the right standards are employed to begin with.

That is another role for regulation in the market because cabling must be at the right level to promote competition but also ensure that the widest area is covered. We must ensure that there is proper inter-connectability of all parts of the service. The Government have a duty to set standards in that respect. I am still not certain whether that is currently the case. I think that it would bear close scrutiny from the Department for Trade and Industry to see what more should be done to strengthen it.

The Government also have a role as a procurer of services. The state still plays a major role in the provision of postal services, has its own telecommunications system and is the biggest single procurer of information technology systems in the country. If one wants to see what a broadband communications system looks like, one can look at Super-JANET. I shall not repeat the joke at the expense of Madam Deputy Speaker, to her great relief, I am sure. Scottish Telecom is busy developing a similar system to connect all the universities in central Scotland, as not every university has access to Super-JANET.

Other public agencies, such as the national health service, buy into broadband services for the transmission of medical records. As a major procurer, the Government have an opportunity to support those developments. A little foresight now could pay large dividends in future. We do not want to repeat the mistakes of the NHS. We must never forget that it wasted some £100 million in the past 10 years on information technology systems which did not work. We certainly do not want to go down that road again and it may be worth our while to pay a little more attention to the development of proper software services which can make use of the available capacity to carry them.

Another role of Government is the promotion of common standards throughout the European Community. I expect that the Minister will refer to that in his wind-up speech, so I do not propose to dwell on it now. It is also important to recognise that the super-highways must not be dominated by one supplier of software, as has largely happened in the computer industry. We must insist on open standards and an open system so that any package can communicate with any other that is available. Although the information super-highway is not an economic panacea, it may be an economic necessity if we are to compete with the rest of the world. If we get the policy framework right soon, we can play a major part in its world-wide development.

The last role of Government that I wish to mention is in promoting social and educational services. I welcome the commitment by the cable companies to cable all schools in their franchised areas. I hope that they will extend that public service offer to public offices, libraries and other elements of the public service infrastructure so that we can start to develop genuinely local information channels which will provide enormous benefit to their areas. Although local government faces tight restrictions on spending, I hope that Ministers will extend the funds available for items such as information technology to allow the development of services which will rapidly become essential. Will the Minister comment on that?

Few people have spent much time considering the potential for social disintegration if information super-highways ultimately make major changes in our patterns of work and leisure. I do not like the idea of parents and children no longer interacting other than remotely. The implications of super-highway development for social cohesion must be studied now—not once it is already in place, when it will be too late.

The information super-highway may be ill-defined, so let us all start to develop a vision of what we want from it so that our demands, in turn, lead to the technological development we need. We may not get a single national network, so let us be clear about how we shall regulate for fair competition and equal access to networks. Let us ensure that those many networks can be properly linked through common standards. SRI doubted whether various industries would converge in the super-highway. In the long run, that may be in the best interests of everyone

involved: consumers, hardware manufacturers, software developers, programme makers, and anyone else who travels along the super-highway, but particularly the consumer.

6.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): This has been a remarkable debate. It has covered a vast area, and in the remaining time I shall find it almost impossible to do justice to the points that have been made. I therefore promise to e-mail everyone who has spoken on points that I do not cover, with the exception of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), with whom I shall use more traditional measures—a glass of whisky and a chat, in person rather than on the video link.

Mr. Kirkwood: May we all have that?

Mr. Taylor: As a Minister, I make a special offer, but I make only one per speech.

The report of the Trade and Industry Select Committee is a remarkable document and I add my praise to the kind comments about the Committee's work and about its Chairman. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Cohen) has done an extremely good job in co-ordinating the work of the Committee. I am extremely grateful to him because, as I said when I appeared before the Committee recently, the report arrived on my desk at virtually the same time as I was appointed Minister for Trade and Technology.

I read it avidly as part of my learning process. The questions that arose as I read the report were ultimately included in the Command Paper, which was published last November. I hope that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central appreciates that it is a measure of the seriousness with which I viewed the report that the Department of Trade and Industry released a Command Paper rather than a simple reply. The hon. Gentleman enjoys detail. If he reads the Command Paper regularly—I know that he would not just glance at it once—he will notice the policy evolutions that it contains. I hope that he will grasp those evolutions because Governments do not often make such progress. He knows exactly to what I refer.

As many hon. Members have said, we face the problem of how to deliver benefits to everyone. It is very easy for me to stand at the Dispatch Box and say that everyone in the country must be on the information super-highway. That statement is a good soundbite that will capture the headlines, but what does it mean? For a start, it is misleading, because there is not, and cannot be, any such thing as a "super-highway". If the word is to be used at all, it should be used in the plural. I was delighted that several hon. Members noticed that fact.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and I agree that the super-highway is an interconnection of many different networks, the evolution of which will often be unpredictable and will stem from both the development of technology and surprising changes in demand patterns. It is not a criticism to say at this juncture that Britain does not have an optical fibre super-highway to every household in the country. Most people would not know what to do with a bit of optical fibre cable if it were stuck into their houses.

One hon. Member—I apologise for not recalling who it was—said that we use the telephone for only a few minutes each day. Americans use the telephone for about five times as long, so they are much more likely to want to use any information system which requires a connection. For example, personal computers in America are much more likely to be connected to the cable network by a modem than computers in this country.

A staggering number of personal computers and a large number of CD-ROMs were purchased in this country last Christmas. That is a very good sign. It is excellent news that more British households are accessing the new multimedia discipline of CD-ROMs, but that has nothing to do with the information super-highway. Multimedia becomes a part of the information super-highway when it is connected to the network and—to give a simple illustration—when a CD-ROM can be updated with statistics from a databank via the telephone line. We are likely to move in that direction more slowly than the Americans, but I would argue that we shall move more rapidly than other countries in the European Union.

The information networks—to use a broader definition—require a series of different stages of technology that will be adapted to meet the likely needs of consumers, such as business men and institutions, but which will be capable of being upgraded as demand changes. That is a very important point that did not quite come out of the otherwise excellent speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central.

It is not a criticism to say that twisted pair is connecting into households, because, with new technology and the increasing roll-out of integrated services data network lines, an enormous amount of information can be sent to any house through more traditional methods. It is certainly true that BT has very little optical fibre close to the household. BT's networks are fibre-reach, but at a certain point in any locality they switch to more traditional systems. Therefore, one cannot criticise the cable companies for following a similar pattern of operation.

The point is: can the networks be upgraded when demand requires it? The Cable Communications Association and BT have satisfied me that that is precisely what can and will happen. For example, BT has made it quite clear that any business with more than five telephone lines can be transferred to optical fibre. That is excellent news.

One of the difficulties that I see as a Minister sponsoring the information society question is that we must encourage individuals to know what to ask for from the networks. What applications will people have for the networks? How will families adapt from their present low level of interactivity—using the television remote control—to using a similar mechanism in order to access home shopping, home banking, long-distance learning and the wonderful array of technological projects which we know exist already? They do not have to be invented; they are there now. One can see them at Martlesham or at the BBC.

The hon Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) rightly paid tribute to the interactive experiments that are going on in Cambridge. They are equally as impressive as the experiments that BT is running in the Ipswich-Colchester area. I do not think that it serves anyone's interest to say that one is good and one is bad.

[Mr. Taylor]

Both experiments are interesting and they will lead to a growth in knowledge of not only what is technically possible, but what individuals are likely to demand.

Mr. McWilliam: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Taylor: I will give way so long as the hon. Gentleman understands that I am under great time pressure.

Mr. McWilliam: The Minister is in grave danger of misleading the House unintentionally because he does not seem to understand the restrictions on compression technology, which enable certain signals to be sent down twisted pair copper, and the lack of that restriction on fibre technology.

Mr. Taylor: I understand some of the technological issues—remarkable as that may seem for a Minister. However, I do not think that we should blind the House with science at the moment. We all want to move ultimately to a fully switched asynchronous transfer mode system; but that is not the point that I am making. We should not denigrate the current system in this country, because it has enormous applications of which we are still not taking full advantage.

Videotron in south London provides interactivity services. It is interesting that, when interactivity is offered to Videotron's customers, the penetration rate grows and the churn rate reduces—to use terms with which the industry is familiar. In other words, Videotron loses fewer customers who subscribed to its services initially.

We already have a very high-grade network. We have more leased lines of more than 2 MB in this country than any other country in Europe. Because of the competition which has flowed from the policies of liberalisation, our telecommunications costs could be cheaper than those of many other countries. Cheaper costs, combined with massively increased computer power, will form the backbone of the super-highways, which one can then try to use for varying levels of application.

Britain is making considerable advances in this area. Our policy of liberalisation has been successful, which is precisely why the European Union is now following that policy. We have already agreed to the liberalisation of alternative structures which are otherwise known as cable. That is why Commissioner Van Miert is becoming extremely agitated that companies are not opening up to the competition that already exists in Britain.

One of the complications for the recommendations of the Select Committee report is that Commissioner Van Miert is making it clear that within the European Union alternative infrastructures such as the cable industry will not be allowed to fall into the hands of the existing dominant telephone companies, which is precisely why he intervened recently in Germany.

The policy in Britain has not only brought considerable investment—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has said, the cable industry alone has produced £10 million of investment in Britain—but has enabled many parts of the country to access alternative infrastructures which are messy to install.

I agree with the point about BS5750. It was an extremely constructive comment that I shall take up with the Cable Communications Association, although since kicking it in the autumn, it has considerably improved its standards and has taken on tree experts to ensure that cable companies do not alienate the very communities which they are hoping subsequently to serve.

Mr. Caborn: May I apologise for my colleagues on the Select Committee, as many of them are in Brussels this evening and therefore cannot be here? One thing may be extremely helpful. The Minister may well agree with it but have some difficulty in responding to the question. Does he consider it right to have an end date for the exclusions of public telecommunications operators of 2001 and 2002? That would be quite an advance for the industry—not just for BT and Mercury, but also for the supplier industries.

Mr. Taylor: I have no wish as Minister to cause unnecessary damage to BT or the other public telecommunications operators caught by the restriction. We must be quite clear that the only restriction on BT is the ability it has to pass simultaneous entertainment programmes down its existing infrastructure. It is now allowed to supply all the interactive services it wishes, and it is allowed to supply entertainment and interactive services to business and industries.

The review dates set were 1998 and 2001 for conveyance and provision. In my view, as I said in evidence to the Select Committee, the precondition for the review is competition. At the moment, the elements of competition are well under way. Those elements were seen and commented on by the Director General of Oftel in his consultative document in December, and I would be quite surprised if reviews did not take place on the dates mentioned. Although there will, of course, be a Conservative Government, it is unlikely that I will be the Minister at the time; nevertheless, that is my impression, and I am repeating what I said in evidence to the Select Committee.

The important point is for us to examine how we can make best use of the varying stages of infrastructure in the United Kingdom. We have heard many interesting comments from hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) mentioned several important issues—in particular, rural areas. I am supremely concerned about rural areas. Clearly, it will not be commercially obvious that every isolated cottage will get the full optical fibre broadband technology, but, as I have already stated, some 92 per cent. of the British population are effectively connected to the telephone network. That is why I have continued with the arrangements in the Command Paper to say that BT should consider itself open to bid on its existing infrastructures for the new local delivery licences that we have announced. That will enable it to reach outlying places.

Secondly, I have had extensive talks with BSkyB. Although one cannot be interactive with BSkyB because satellite receivers do not work in the reverse direction, BSkyB linked to a telephone line can provide what is pretty close to interactivity, as the smart card can then pick up the requested programme, whether it be educational or video on demand.

Thirdly, I am looking closely at releasing more radio spectrum, which is not easy. The point made earlier about radio spectrum is that it is complicated. The area that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) mentioned is not all MOD; some of it is already in use. I

understand the technical problems and I shall not bore the House with them. I am also looking at above 10 GH. There is considerable interest in both those areas and, as they say, watch this space.

The difficulty is not just the MOD. We will get more efficient use of radio spectrum when we move to digital television. The problem with analogue broadcasts is that they need to be kick started at each transmitter, which obscure a great deal of radio spectrum in and around the particular transmitter area. I am considering various possibilities, and I am keen to make progress as fast as possible.

Speeches this evening have shown a great deal of interest. I was impressed by the knowledge of the hon. Member for Blaydon about everything technical, but not about the Bangemann report or the G7 conclusions. I do not want to get into a tangle with the hon. Gentleman, but if he takes the time to read the Green Papers that the Commission has produced, he will find that they follow closely the direction that we have taken in Britain, largely because we had a massive input on the whole process. Therefore the European Union is moving in our direction.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) made some interesting comments. I agree with her about the BBC, but I do not have time to get into that. I am also worried about encryption. The opportunities for open democracy are intriguing, but I will have to urge hon. Members to call for another debate if they wish me to raise that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall) made some interesting points about convergence of technology and raising the profile of communications. I shall willingly do that soon.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) was worried about interconnection, which, commercially, is in everybody's interests and is happening. Some interesting points were made about monitoring of the Internet, and I am happy to answer them in writing because I am concerned about them too and I think it is important that we examine video on demand, which concerns the ITC.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is hard at work in his constituency on the Internet and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) has considerable experience in the subject. He was right to say that British capital is now coming in—

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, the debate was concluded, pursuant to the resolution (6 March).

Question deferred, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).

Class VIII, Vote 7

Retail Planning Policy

[Relevant documents: The Fourth Report from the Environment Committee of Session 1993-94, on Shopping Centres and their Future (House of Commons Paper No. 359); the Government's Response to the Fourth Report from the Environment Committee: Shopping Centres and their Future (Cm 2767); and the Department of the Environment Annual Report 1995; The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995-96 to 1997-98 (Cm 2807).]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £1,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1995 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment and its agencies on administration, including research, royal commissioners, committees, etc., and by the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency on appeals, and by the Building Research Establishment Executive Agency on buildings research and surveys.—*[Sir Paul Beresford.]*

6.47 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the opportunity under the supplementary estimates to introduce to the House the report of the Select Committee on shopping centres and their future. I begin by paying tribute to the former Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), who chaired all the sessions in which we took evidence and started to prepare the Chairman's report, which was finished by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr.Field). I certainly pay tribute to the work they both put in, as did the other members of the Committee, in producing what I believe was a useful report.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Clerks to the Committee, to the Committee's research staff and to our advisers, Ross Davies and Rory Joyce, all of whom helped to make the inquiry interesting. I believe that we all learned a great deal about it.

I had a view about shopping before I started the inquiry. I felt that it was all pretty boring, and something I was quite keen to avoid. Once we get into these inquiries, we suddenly discover a whole series of jargon, but there is also much interesting information. I certainly learned a lot.

I discovered the meaning of so-called comparison shopping, activity shopping and factory outlets, which are quite different from the ones I was used to the north of England, where the factory had a shop at the back of the works. It was originally a device to stop pilfering, by means of which the people who worked at the factory were able to buy goods on the cheap, in order to encourage them not to take them for free. Eventually, the factory shops spread, and people in the neighbourhood used them. I gather that factory outlets now constitute an industry.

Probably the most important political message that I gained from the inquiry related to the turn of the political tide. In the 1980s, there was a strong belief—epitomised, perhaps, by Nicholas Ridley's time at the Department of the Environment—that we could leave everything to the market, while minimising planning. Since then, we have realised that we made many mistakes during that period, and that better planning is needed. As the Committee began to recognise, planning is all about what people want; but a sub-theme must be what is good for people. We perceived that we must be careful in identifying what people wanted from the shopping of the future.

The Committee's task was made particularly difficult by the fact that people have an ambiguous view of shopping. They want to preserve town centres, for which they feel considerable affection, but they want shopping to be as convenient as possible. The difficulty lies in marrying the two requirements—preserving town centres, while making them convenient.

I am pleased not only with the report, but with the Government's response. I welcome their agreement with the thrust of the report, but I want to know how quickly they will implement their response to it. I agree with the Government that planning policy guidance note 6 needs revision, and I gather—if I understood correctly what was said during Question Time this afternoon—that the Government will try to complete that revision by the summer; I was not entirely certain whether they intended to complete the revision by the summer, or complete the consultation by that time.

Let me emphasise to the Government that the delay between their announcement that they want to revise the planning guidance and the actual revision of that guidance makes life very difficult for planning inspectors involved in inquiries, and those who present evidence at such inquiries. Should they present the evidence using the old guidance? Should they use the Minister's utterances, our report or the Minister's response to it? The process will be much tidier if the Government put the new planning guidance in place as soon as possible.

The Government did not accept the existence of problems relating to PPG 13 and transport issues, although they conceded that the guidance had been misinterpreted. They now say that they want to give further guidance. I welcome that, but again I urge the Minister to act quickly. It is particularly important to make car-parking requirements clear to planners.

Most out-of-town shopping areas have free car parking, while most in the town centres charge. That is ridiculous. Not every member of the Select Committee agreed with me, but I am very concerned about the charges levied by many local authorities. It is easy to raise such charges, because Governments make it virtually impossible for local authorities to raise money in other ways.

Stockport pushed up car-parking charges, introducing "park and display"; five years ago, I hardly noticed the handing of tickets from one car to another, but that practice now seems to be on the increase, which suggests that consumers think the system unfair. Let me tell local authorities that are rightly trying to defend their town centres that, if they allow parking charges to rise too much, they will undermine the feature that they seek to defend—although I do not blame them, because they cannot raise money in any other way.

Information is another issue that the Government should consider. Everyone goes to planning inquiries armed with all the "impact studies"—studies of what will happen if a new shop is built in a certain area. What seems to be lacking is the follow-up study two or three years after the completion of developments, to prove the correctness or otherwise of all the predictions.

Another problem is the fact that much of the available information about shopping is commercially confidential. It is easy enough for stores such as Marks and Spencer to ask the computer where their customers come from in order to assess the impact, but they are reluctant to pass on such information. The Government should find ways of providing more information about people's actual shopping habits, rather than mere predictions.

The Committee received strong evidence that good town centre management is essential to combating the decline of the town centre, as opposed to out-of-town developments. The question is, who pays? Opposition Members certainly would like local authorities to be able to set the business rate again, enabling the business community to contribute directly to those authorities.

The Committee could not agree on an appropriate mechanism, but was united on the need for arrangements to deal with town centre management. It was clear that those who were prepared to pay a voluntary levy resented the freeloaders. Although I would not say that the Committee was able to offer the Government a clear recommendation, it highlighted the problem.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The hon. Gentleman has made some interesting points about car-parking charges. As my local authority, Taunton Deane, has learnt from experience, pedestrianisation schemes may drive people away from the centre of town. I was also interested in his point about business rates and freeloaders. I hope that those in charge of the planning system will note the increasing number of charity shops, which do not pay rates, occupying vacant premises: that has led to much bitterness among shops that are trying to trade commercially.

Mr. Bennett: I shall deal shortly with the question of not just charity shops, but empty shops.

Many authorities have shown great enthusiasm for closed-circuit television surveillance, which plays an important role in making people feel safe in town centres. The desire to preserve historic centres sometimes makes parking difficult, but it is important to make people feel safe. One factor that encourages people to go to out-of-town centres is the feeling of safety that results from parking facilities that are, on the whole, obvious.

My only reservation is that, if CCTV is to be used, there will be implications for civil liberties. I therefore strongly urge the Government to come up with a code of practice. It should ensure that people know which areas are covered by the cameras and that the cameras are monitored, preferably by the police. If they monitor the cameras, the system can be effective—but that means that the cameras must be subject to regular supervision.

The temptation is just to put in the cameras, but without regular monitoring to show people that they are effective, they will become discredited, and a great deal of money will have been spent for nothing.

As part of town centre management, it is important that people try to reduce the number of empty shops. I am not sure whether I disapprove of charity shops, because it is far better that shops should be occupied—by charities, if necessary—than that they should be left empty. A row of empty shops gives a town centre a depressing feeling.

One of the problems facing business people with empty shops is that they are often reluctant to accept that they are never going to be filled, and that some alternative use should be found for them. In Greater Manchester, there are one or two chains of betting companies that own betting shops that have closed down. As long as they are closed, no one has to admit that they are a failure: they can remain on the books with a certain value. But if people attempt to convert them to houses, or for other uses, almost certainly someone will have to write them off as a loss. It is therefore important to encourage people who have no realistic prospect of bringing their shops back into shopping use to look for alternative uses for them.

I welcome the fact that the Government have been encouraging the idea of bringing back accommodation above shops; but there is a strong argument, for some town centres, in favour of bringing the whole shop back into residential use instead of leaving it empty for a long time to create a depressing feeling in the area.

Local authorities should not just defend shopping in town centres, but should do what they can to ensure that there are as many shoppers close to the centres as possible. It is not just a question of discouraging out of town shopping areas; it is also important to discourage out of town offices. The more we can ensure that people work and enjoy their leisure in town centres, the more they will be present there to use the shops. Much of Stockport's strength as a shopping area depends on the number of people working in the offices in the town centre who can do their shopping locally at lunch time.

Another point that was put to the Committee very strongly, in the context of reinforcing town centres, concerned putting land back together. It was pointed out to us that local authorities suffer from certain restrictions on their capital acquisitions and on their ways of handling capital projects. That in turn makes it difficult for them to put packets of land back together.

Many local authorities did this in the 1960s, although they did not always produce particularly imaginative schemes for putting packets of land back together. We need more imaginative schemes for this practice, so as to defend our town centres. Local authorities need the powers to do it. There is a striking contrast between the ease with which one can put a development on a big piece of land away from the town centre and the difficulty of bringing land back to the town centre.

My next point concerns the number of planning permissions in the pipeline. Representing as I do a Greater Manchester seat, I am worried about the proposals for Dumplington, from the point of view of Tameside and Stockport. I understand that the issue has now gone to the High Court, which has discussed it, and a decision is awaited in two months' time. I do not expect the Minister to be able to say much about it because it is sub judice, but this development would cause major problems for shopping centres throughout the Greater Manchester area.

All over the country, large numbers of planning permissions granted under the old rules have never come to fruition—the projects have never been built. If the Government are serious about defending our town centres and regenerating them, they must in some way attempt to time-limit planning permissions and ensure that they do not spark off a large number of other applications.

The Government must look favourably on some of the older systems of trading. One of the strengths of the town centres of Greater Manchester has been the old markets. Ashton, in Tameside, has one of the best markets in the

[Mr. Bennett]

north of England. It is important that local councils learn to cherish such markets. I am a little worried about Denton market, which is only barely surviving. I hope that local and central Government will do what they can to nurture the marketplace. Market traders provide small but important items to consumers—items considered too insignificant to be sold in out of town shopping areas.

I have a plea to make about Stockport. I greatly regret the fact that the 1960s-built shopping precinct has not had glass put over it. I am disappointed that the centre developers have not felt able to go that far.

I come next to a pet hate of mine: activity shopping. At the risk of boring members of the Committee, I should point out that many of my acquaintances in Manchester often tell me that they are going up to the lake district for a day out. They proceed to drive up the motorway, thereby increasing the congestion, to places such as Ambleside or Keswick. There they take five or 10 minutes in the fresh air by the lakeside. Then they go around the shops and end up buying an item of walking equipment—which they do not really use. They then have a pleasant lunch and drive back to Manchester.

I can understand that that is a nice thing to do, but it is environmentally destructive. It has meant that all the walking and climbing shops have disappeared from the centre of Manchester; meanwhile, the motorways are clogged with traffic. That is environmentally unattractive. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may not agree, but they ought to think about these issues—

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that people in Manchester be issued with passports so that they cannot get out?

Mr. Bennett: I am certainly not suggesting that. I do suggest that people think carefully about the environmental implications of what they are doing. I feel somewhat cynical when I see such people carrying stickers in the backs of their cars claiming that they want to protect the environment.

The same applies to trips to garden centres. I do not blame people for wanting to visit them, but when they go out to buy a compost kit, as people increasingly do from our urban centres, they create far more environmental damage in the course of their journeys than the environmental good achieved with the kit.

People need to ask themselves questions about shopping. I well understand that people in the lake district and in other environmentally sensitive areas have to earn a living, so it is attractive to them to build up their trade—but I insist that we need to think about the whole subject again.

Another of my pet hates is the McDonald's drive-in fast food outlet in Stockport, which causes major traffic congestion. I can of course see the attractions for youngsters of going to McDonald's when they have been out shopping, but it is certainly not environmentally attractive to lure people to such establishments in town centres simply so that they can drive through and take away food.

I hope that I have been able to show that ours was an interesting inquiry, which produced a useful report. We are pleased that the Government have taken so many of our recommendations to heart. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us how soon he intends to get the new planning guidance in place, and to what extent the Government will encourage more closed circuit television surveillance of town centres, which will make people feel safer.

If the public want to preserve and protect town centres, as I believe they do, they must nurture them by patronising town centre shops.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I heartily endorse most of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Does he agree that the Government have an important role in nurturing town centres, particularly in undertaking a much-needed review of the valuation system? I would like a tilting in favour of small town centre shops and a bigger burden on large supermarkets. Rates are a considerable burden on small shops having low turnovers by comparison with supermarkets having huge turnovers, to which the rating system does not matter too much.

Mr. Bennett: That should be taken into account.

I conclude by leaving in the minds of hon. Members my strong view that, if people want to protect their town centres, they must use them.

7.10 pm

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I congratulate the Government on arranging this debate on the Select Committee's report, and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on his contribution. Debates in response to Select Committee reports are good for the House and for the Committee system. I hope that there will be opportunities for debating other reports, particularly that on the environmental impact of leisure activities, which has generated much public concern. I may add that the Select Committee was served by two Chairmen and it would be remiss not to pay tribute to their roles in producing the report.

I thank the Government for their response to the report, which was unusually positive and generous, but perhaps the Government have not gone far enough in respect of one or two recommendations, where further clarification is needed.

The report tapped a rich vein in the extent of public concern about retail planning. It is a question not just of pressures on the countryside, because that is everywhere to be seen and is something of which the public have been aware since the Acts of Enclosure. Pressure has continued, and has become more relentless and overwhelming in the past 15 or 20 years.

It is a question also of the damage done by the change to a car-driven society and a growing car culture. It is a question of the wider environmental impact of energy consumption and pollution and of new patterns of movement. It is above all—as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish suggested—a question of the impact of retail planning policies on town centres and of the quality of life in towns and cities. As I and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) represent entirely urban constituencies, that aspect is of considerable concern to our constituents.

There is a widespread perception in this country and abroad that many British towns and cities are dirty, dark, inaccessible, unfriendly, unsafe, often extremely ugly and, by and large, to be avoided by all sensible, right-thinking

people. It is small wonder that many leading retailers have chosen to avoid them. More than a quarter of the nation's shopping space is out of town, and its proportion of sales has risen 200 per cent. since 1982. Out-of-town superstores account for one in three retail sales. Those phenomenal statistics suggest the scale of the problem confronting the Government.

That change has occurred because the planning system has allowed and encouraged it, and because of widespread ignorance of and apathy to the environmental consequences. Such a change has not occurred everywhere, as members of the Committee found on their visits. In some places, local authorities pursued sensible policies and strategies over a number of years. Most of my colleagues on the Committee would particularly commend Norwich. Even though it has a Labour-controlled council, it has implemented a coherent strategic plan over time, to ensure that Norwich—one of our historic cities—is preserved and that there is harmony between it and the surrounding countryside. Norwich has got right many of the important considerations to which the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish referred, such as parking.

Members of the Committee also visited Fribourg. It was virtually flattened in the second world war, yet it has been transformed into one of the most attractive and pleasant cities in Germany. Again, the authorities got the balance right between the city and the surrounding countryside. Fribourg is a thoroughly pleasant place in which to live, work, eat and shop. We learned a great deal from it.

I am delighted that the Government have fully taken up many of the Committee's key recommendations, including that planning guidance should be reviewed to introduce a presumption in favour of town centres, and that there should be a clear sequential test for new retail developments. The developer should be required to show that no suitable site is available in a town centre or on the edge of the town. Only then would an out-of-town centre be considered. The Government should go slightly further. It is not enough to accept the presumption in favour of town centres and the sequential test. The Government must make clear how they intend to review PPG 6, and to make a statement introducing the presumption in favour of town centres and the sequential test, which could be used by planning authorities in response to planning applications.

The Government should perhaps consider withdrawing the guidance in paragraph 37 of PPG 6, that planning authorities should not refuse permission for developments on the ground of the effect on a town centre, unless there is clear evidence to suggest that the result would undermine the centre's viability and vitality, which otherwise would continue to serve the community well. We should state quite clearly that the onus of proof should be on the out-of-town developer. I hope that, as a start, the Minister will give a clear assurance about that in his reply.

I agree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish that we must be much clearer on the dichotomy between PPG 6 and PPG 13, especially on the issue of parking. I hope that the Minister will address that as well.

The fundamental concern for my constituents was addressed by the Committee and was the substance of the remarks by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish: the issue of town centre management, the importance of which we cannot underestimate because it can make a great difference to the quality of people's lives. The Government should get firmly behind town management schemes and use the report and their response as starting blocks to move in that direction. As I have said, these schemes are making a great difference to people's lives.

As I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South will agree, the private sector is responding. I am convinced from my own experience that it will continue to respond if it is given a little extra help by the public sector, the Government and local authorities. Our experience in Blackpool, which has appointed an excellent town centre manager, Mr. Nigel Hanson, is that the private sector is waiting to respond but needs a little bit of extra Government help.

Perhaps during the party conference the Minister and the Secretary of State will look at the work that Nigel Hanson is doing and will seriously consider the beneficial impact that a closed-circuit television system could have on the quality of life and people's feeling of security in Blackpool. I hope that the Minister will add his support to the campaign by me and my hon. Friends to ensure that Blackpool gets a closed-circuit television system as soon as possible as part of the closed-circuit television competition, which I hope the Government will be able to extend.

I endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) about charity shops, which are a terrible problem in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South. They are a direct result of bad planning and the reluctance of the local authority to become involved in dealing with the matter.

Mr. David Nicholson: I should like to set the record straight. I am not against charity shops, which, of course, are better than empty shops, but they cause resentment among commercial shopkeepers who have to pay rates. Perhaps I could draw my hon. Friend into examining the whole issue of business rates valuation. If a shop has not been able to force down its rent during the recession, as far as I can see it will not benefit from the rates revaluation. Some of us, certainly those of us with constituencies in the south-west and the south, are hearing from constituents who face substantial rate hoists despite five or six years of recession. That applies especially to town centre shops.

Mr. Elletson: I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's point, which was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). We in Blackpool face a similar problem over rate valuations, and I hope that the Minister will take seriously the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives about the need to look again at the rating valuation system, particularly for small businesses in town centres.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): The number of charity shops is becoming excessive. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) spoke about turning shops into houses and said that in the past local authorities have tried to put such schemes together. With all his influence, would my hon. Friend consider pressing the Minister on this gathering together of empty shops and their conversion to houses? That is done with older shop premises. Such conversions could have a theme, and should be properly constructed. Local authorities could provide pump priming to the private sector, which could take over

[Sir Donald Thompson]

the shops and turn them into reasonable accommodation. By their very nature, because they have people in them, such buildings could revitalise town centres.

Mr. Elletson: My hon. Friend asks me to use my influence with the Minister, but I am sure that my influence is nowhere near as considerable as his. No doubt the Minister has heard my hon. Friend and will take note.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish did not mention an area of great concern to the 6 million disabled people in the country and the 40,000 on the Fylde coast—the issue of access for disabled people in town centres and especially shop mobility schemes. I hope that the Minister will take a serious look at that and examine ways in which assistance could be given to local authorities and the private sector to extend shop mobility schemes. That would make a great difference to the quality of people's lives.

Will the Minister look carefully at a planning application which is coming his way from a German group, LIDL Developments, which wants to build a large superstore on the outskirts of my constituency in Anchorsholme? Such a development would be highly damaging. If the application comes his way, I hope that he will ensure that it is treated with the care and consideration it deserves, and is then rejected.

As the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said, the key issue in town centre management is funding—so who pays? We may say that town centre management is making a real difference and that we need to extend it, but ultimately we return to the question of who pays. I was delighted to see that in their response to the Select Committee report the Government are considering ways to fund an extension to the town centre management scheme.

First, I hope that the Government will look at the question of properly funding the Association of Town Centre Management. Secondly, I hope that they will look imaginatively at ways of levering in private sector finance, perhaps through the single regeneration budget. I trust that they will also look at tax relief for private sector investors for approved projects in town centres.

Thirdly, and perhaps more controversially for some of my hon. Friends, I hope that the Government will take seriously what the Committee said about the uniform business rate. I do not ask that they return it entirely to local authorities, but I hope that they will consider some of the recommendations by the Association of Town Centre Management about a limited and exclusive return for specifically town centre-related projects. That would be an important way to address the issue and would perhaps give local authorities the ability to be realistic about town centre management programmes.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the big problems with the uniform business rate, which I know affects his part of Blackpool as it does mine, is that banks say to small businesses, "We are revaluing your business downwards," thereby making it even more difficult for such businesses to get credit? However, the commercial valuations of the district valuer for the uniform business rate are now determined by out-of-town shopping centres and uniform business rates are going up. That means that small businesses in our area and those in other areas are being hit both ways—revalued downwards by the bank and upwards for UBR purposes.

Mr. Elletson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. As he says, it is a particular problem in our area.

I do not wish to take up any more time. These are important issues. Britain's towns and cities have undergone a fundamental qualitative change, and in many cases it has not been a change for the better.

We have to make our towns and cities places where people will again want to shop, live, eat and breathe. We have to stop the relentless destructive assault on the countryside and on our rural heritage. We have to create a climate in which, once again, town and country co-exist in harmony and with a clear mutual interest.

I know that we all recognise the problem—no one, perhaps, more clearly than my hon. Friend the Minister and our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I hope that the Select Committee's report will mark the beginning of a new effort to deal with the problem. We cannot ignore it, because if we do we will condemn the richest part of our national heritage—the countryside—to gradual desolation and create a wasteland in our towns and cities.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is determined that that will not happen and that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is determined to move forward with new initiatives to ensure that our towns and cities are vital, vibrant and vigorous and places that we will be able to leave as our inheritance to our grandchildren.

7.30 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I welcome this debate, as I did the investigation into and report of the Environment Select Committee on shopping centres and their future. The retail sector is one of the largest employers in the United Kingdom with 2.2 million full and part-time employees. The industry is both flexible and innovative and has shown itself able to compete with the best in the world.

However, recession and the continuing stagnation of consumer demand casts a shadow over recent performance. The whole debate on the future of town centres has been occasioned by the widely held view that the balance between the high street and out-of-town developments has tilted far too far in favour of the latter. I should like to be able to say that the debate and the Select Committee report are timely, but I fear that that may not be the case, because in at least one essential aspect we have all quite literally missed the boat.

A recent study has tentatively shown that 12 million sq ft of planning permission has already been granted for out-of-town developments, which I am told is enough for more than 400 new superstores. I say that tentatively because no accurate statistics are collected nationally on planning permissions or other essential research and information in the retail industry—a subject to which I shall return later.

I am a keen supporter of the concept of a plan-led system, as that is undoubtedly the best way to ensure certainty for the retail industry, local authorities and local communities. To achieve that, the planning system needs to operate efficiently and effectively, which means that

the planning guidance offered by the Government must, in the words of the Select Committee report, be "clear and consistent".

The Secretary of State has put his name to and, indeed, possibly staked his reputation on the new approach outlined in the revised PPG 6 and PPG 13, which seeks to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres. However, he and Conservative Members must recognise that the Government cannot easily escape the consequences of their approach to retail developments, which they pursued with relish during the 1980s when superstore openings increased, in a headlong rush, from 212 to 580—an increase of three per month during that period, most of them in out-of-town locations.

If the Minister is looking for some confirmation that there is widespread cynicism about the planning system and the changes that he has introduced, he need look no further than a poll conducted by "Property Week" and Gallup in June 1994 of a sample of investors-developers, which showed that 45 per cent. of those surveyed believed that the changes would have no effect on their investment in out-of-town developments. In fact, 31 per cent. believed that PPG 6 and PPG 13 would result in them stepping up their out-of-town investment. Only 13 per cent. said that they would invest less in out-of-town developments. It appears that the investment-development community is yet to be convinced that the Government really have had a change of heart.

I have a particular interest in shopping centres, which I should declare at this point. As well as being a member of the all-party retail group, I am sponsored as a Member of Parliament by the Co-operative movement. My official title in the House is a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament. However, I must make the point that I receive no personal remuneration for that.

The Co-operative movement is still one of Britain's largest retailers, with a turnover of £7.3 billion. It employs 74,000 staff and has membership in excess of 8 million. There are very few things that the movement does not sell through its 92 superstores and 4,500 shopping outlets. However, the movement consists of more than 50 independent retailing organisations with a tremendous diversity both in size and shopping profile. That varies from region to region and, in the case of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, from country to country. It varies from large national societies with turnovers measured in billions of pounds to small localised co-operatives with just a few village stores.

As one would expect, the response of societies depends, as with other retailers, on their individual circumstances. Therefore, it is not possible—or, in some ways, desirable—to attempt to reconcile them, and that I have not tried to do. In fact, the views that I express today are my own, but they also reflect my long involvement with the retail Co-operative movement and with the all-party retail group. I believe that in the retail world in general, but in the co-operative societies in particular, what I have to say will be of some interest.

If we are to overcome the problems highlighted in the Select Committee report and in much of the public debate on the issue, we have to overcome, in the words of the Confederation of British Industry planning task force report of 1992,

"the absence of a national consensus between central and local government, business and the public about the key priorities for shaping the nation for the 21st century."

The report concluded that,

"in the absence of a national lead, many significant planning applications are in danger of leading to local debates which should be encompassed by explicit national policy."

Before turning to the Select Committee report and the Department's response, I wish briefly to comment on the clear inconsistencies that continue to exist between the various policy guidance papers and ministerial statements, some of which have been highlighted in the report. I predict that the Minister will reject a charge of inconsistency. However, if he will not accept the concerns expressed in the Select Committee report, I refer him to the repeated correspondence and comment in both the trade and quality press pointing out those inconsistencies—not in an attempt to belittle the changes that have been introduced over the past two years, but to urge the Minister to address the genuine concern in the industry for a clarification of the issues.

To be fair, some of those concerns have been addressed, at least in part, by the Government. I refer to the decisions to refuse planning permission for a shopping centre at Duxford and to stop the edge-of-town supermarket at Ludlow. Many would say, "So far, so good." My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) referred to Dumplington near Greater Manchester. No sooner did the Government refuse the applications at Duxford and Ludlow than they referred the application for planning permission at Dumplington to the House of Lords, with their support. It is a quite controversial legal case, concerning the balance between town centre and out-of-town development, and it should be a test case for the Government's new policy.

The Government have also ignored the widespread opposition in the north-west to that development. It includes almost all of the local planning authorities in the area. We can imagine, therefore, the mixture of shock and incredulity when people read in the Government's response to the Select Committee report the statement that following research carried out under the Merry Hill impact study, the Government could see little case for further new regional shopping development. Many folk would have said, "Like Dumplington." With confusion like that at the highest level, is it any wonder that planning authorities find it difficult, if not impossible, to tell rhetoric from reality?

There will be dismay at the Government's response to the Select Committee's request for clear and consistent planning guidance. Clarification in the guidance that superstores are best located in or on the edge of town centres, and a clear statement that the Department supports the sequential test—that planning permission outside the town centre will not be given if a suitable site within or close by is available—must be the minimum requirements if the Government's stated intentions are to be taken at face value.

I believe in towns centres, both as retailing areas and as a focus, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish mentioned, for communities and community activities. I am not overstating the case in saying that it is generally agreed that the most practical response to promoting town centres—making them safe, cleaner, more attractive and more relevant to local people's needs—is to develop town centre management. Surely it is common ground to suggest that that must be based on partnership between all the relevant parties to ensure that it is effective.

[Mr. Thomas McAvoy]

Great strides have already been made. Only a few years ago, there was only one full-time town centre manager; now there are more than 80. Major constraint exists on that development because of finance. The Government response does not get to grips with the issue.

Dumping the problem on hard-pressed local authorities, especially in the context of a series of restrictive, Government-imposed revenue support grant settlements, will not lead to a solution. Many local authorities are too small to be able to respond effectively to the demands of their town centres. Retailers naturally feel aggrieved that they are having to fork out in the form of the uniform business rate to local communities without any return in terms of dealing with their problems. That causes complaint.

The Government should not only co-ordinate the development of town centre managements or, as suggested in the report, town centre authorities, but should take the lead in providing the finance that will allow them to respond to the needs of local communities. That will not only enhance their shopping facilities, but put the heart back into town centres.

I mentioned earlier the lack of adequate research on planning and retail development. The report has made a number of welcome suggestions. Again, the Government have not gone far enough in recognising the urgent need for credible information; otherwise, how can local plans be developed or decisions on major retail development determined with any certainty? This and any future Government have a duty to collect and make available accurate information.

Effective decision-making must be clear, consistent and, most important, above reproach. It must based on relevant and up-to-date information. Only Government can provide that. The planning system will achieve the objectives set by Government and local planning authorities only if both have available data that are collected, analysed and freely available, so that public can be confident of the decisions taken on their behalf.

I turn now to the recommendations and planning obligations, the consequences of which are usually summed up in the term "planning gain". The Select Committee describes current guidance as "muddled". Recent court decisions have added considerable confusion to that muddle. To the layman, or at least to this layman, the courts appear to contradict themselves over the issue of whether a planning gain is a material consideration when determining a planning application. The latest of those cases awaits a decision in the other place. I accept that the Department must await their Lordships' deliberations, but it must come as a surprise, not to say a disappointment, that they have agreed only to consider further the recommendation to issue new guidance on planning obligations.

That response is breathtaking in its failure to recognise the concerns being expressed by all parties in all regions. There are many examples of that in Plymouth and Leicester, where planning gains have been mentioned, and where confusion and uncertainty exists about local authorities' response to them. I hope that the Government will strengthen considerably their endorsement of the principle that unacceptable development should never be permitted, and that planning gain should not be allowed to render it acceptable.

Finally, I have an admission. I recognise, as, I think, most fair-minded people do, that—as in so many other areas of planning—finding the proper balance between shopping centres and out-of-town developments is a difficult and thankless task. Retailing is a dynamic industry and must remain flexible and innovative if it is to be as successful in the future as it has been in the past. However, we must recognise that what is best for the individual as a consumer is sometimes not seen by that individual to be in his or her best interests as a local resident.

Government policies must reflect consumer needs, but I hope that no one will support the free-for-all that has taken place in the United States of America, to the detriment of everyone. The Government must take a longer-term view and seek to balance the needs of the retail industry with the demand to create vital and viable town centres. Clarity and consistency in the planning regime, while not a sufficient condition, will assist in ensuring that the proper balance is maintained and, at the same time, will deliver real choice to the individual, both as consumer and as defender of his or her community. That responsibility is incumbent on Government.

7.47 pm

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): People who believe that the only interest in politics is confrontation will be a little bored by this evening's debate, as it is clear that there is substantial agreement across the Chamber about the report and its recommendations. I welcome the Government's acceptance of much of what has been said. Of course, there will be some arguments around the periphery. I would not want to disappoint hon. Members who enjoy confrontation, but the substance is agreed.

In the spirit of that agreement, I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), in congratulating the work of the two previous Chairmen of the Select Committee, to whom we owe a great deal. It is interesting that, in his ministerial duties, one of them has managed to avoid having to respond to the debate, but they both contributed substantially to the Committee's work and, in particular, to this report.

I must ask myself why we all want to support town centres. What is it about them that is attractive to us and that leads us to rush to their defence in the face of clearly changing patterns, change that is continuing? It is a little like the people who drive on motorways and complain about the cars in front of them that are causing obstructions and emitting fumes. "How disgraceful," they say. "These people should be taken off the motorways so that we can make our journey more speedily." Almost the same pattern of thought applies to shopping. People wish to preserve town centres and they want their facilities to be available, but they are often reluctant to spend their money there. They potter off to the nearest out-of-town centre rather than to their local shop.

We want town centre shopping to be preserved and sustained because the town centre is the historic core of the community. People relate to it; they have a sense of belonging. For people in villages, towns and cities, the town centre represents an element of continuity, which

people want to preserve. All of us need to belong somewhere. When we have a focal point in our town centres, that belonging is personified. The sense of community among all of us, and the need to avoid rootlessness and the lack of responsibility that follows from that, are perhaps the most important factors.

I am not, of course, suggesting that the preservation of town centres is of the essence in fighting crime or in maintaining a proper and reasonable way of life in this country—I should not wish to exaggerate the point. But it is necessarily a part of community life, of belonging and of the feeling of responsibility and of sharing that goes with those factors.

There are other reasons why we should want to preserve town centres. The existence of local shops means that people do not have to travel, which reduces their mileage. We need to preserve town centres for those who do not have ready access to vehicles. We need town centres to provide variety and choice. Too often, as we go from one supermarket to another or from one warehouse to another, we see the same products presented in the same way. If retailing in this country is to rejuvenate and renew itself, remain attractive and offer new opportunities, there must be variety and choice, which town centres in particular can provide.

Above all, we need to ensure that town centres stay alive and do not fall into decay and become simply another example of inner-city failure and economic problems. We need to prevent buildings from falling into disuse and to avoid the disrepair that goes with it.

Many of us perhaps approach the planning system with some trepidation because we like market forces to prevail and want the spirit of market forces to allow people to choose where to shop and how to operate. However, I believe that the whole concept of the planning system is that market forces are channelled and shaped according to other criteria. Unless we dispense altogether with the paraphernalia of planning procedures, we need to ensure that planning is directed in what we consider to be the best interests of the country as a whole.

I start from the premise that planning must be directed towards the rejuvenation of inner-city areas, but what are the great advantages of out-of-town shopping centres, which encourage people to go there rather than elsewhere? Out-of-town shopping is clearly convenient, being under one roof or a series of connected roofs. Access is by car, making the removal of heavy purchases easy. There is security, tidiness and cleanliness. In addition, people can expect a certain quality of goods and service. Out-of-town shopping centres are cost-effective and provide a leisure activity. People find it fun to shop—my wife tells me that regularly, but I have yet to understand the "fun" involved.

Having considered the advantages of out-of-town shopping centres, we must consider how town centres can compete. Hon. Members have referred to car parking policies. There is a need to ensure that car parking spaces are available and at a price that encourages people to use them. Unlike the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, I do not accept that we should impose on local authorities a duty to provide free car parking. That must be a local decision made by local government taking into account local considerations, not least its own financial position. However, we should wherever possible ensure that parking is cheap in order to encourage the short-term use of car parking.

There is a need to readdress the issues dealt with in PPG 13 relating to the differentiation between the commuter and the customer. Commuter parking should be treated differently from customer parking and encouragement given for the latter. We must ensure that local authority car parking provision is of a high standard. In other words, it must be not only cheap and convenient but secure, clean and tidy.

The Automobile Association recently produced some information relating to why people choose not to use multi-storey car parks. Over 35 per cent. of those asked said that they did not wish to use them because they did not feel safe doing so. Just under 10 per cent. found them too dark or creepy, whatever that means. I suspect that those feelings relate to security, cleanliness and tidiness. If town centres are to compete, it is essential that they provide the right sort of car parking. Traffic management schemes are necessary to avoid congestion, and convenient car parking is of the essence.

We have to examine ways in which controls should be imposed on out-of-town centres. We shall not change the habit whereby most people do their weekly food shopping at a supermarket or similar establishment. People's shopping aspirations and requirements in that respect will not lead them back into the town centre in large numbers, but we need to examine what town centres are best at providing. They can offer convenience shopping and quality goods such as clothes and accessories, in which they can compete better than out-of-town centres.

We need to look critically at the number of building societies, banks, estate agents and—I must declare an interest—solicitors' offices that sap the retail core of the town centre and reduce the number of people passing the shop door, which goes to the heart of an individual outlet's economy. We need to limit the activity of factory outlets and introduce coherent retail policies as part of the regional planning guidance through to the local planning system. There needs to be an overall view of the impact that out-of-town shopping, or even major edge-of-town shopping, may have on trading patterns in an individual structure plan area, not a local plan area but a regional and sometimes even an inter-regional area, because the largest centres have a widely felt impact.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Where has the hon. Gentleman been recently? It is the Government who have been destroying the concept of regional planning or the planning of town centres. Out-of-town shopping has grown at the expense of towns such as Huddersfield, where the only diversity is offered by the different charity shops, not even by solicitors' offices or shops offering the interesting goods that he described. The Government have consistently sought to destroy our town centres.

Mr. Thomason: What has happened to town centres is that local authorities have granted planning consents for out-of-town and edge-of-town shopping. There has been no rejuvenation of town centres. Such rejuvenation is not only a component of the operation of central Government but, to a much greater extent, a matter for local government and individual shopkeepers, landowners and others. I shall deal more fully with that issue in a moment.

We need to examine the production of impact studies on an agreed basis. We must ensure that planning appeals can be fought with an understanding of exactly what an

[Mr. Thomason]

impact study is, what the criteria for it may be and how we assess regional shopping patterns that might develop as a result of the granting of a planning application.

Design needs to be improved. I do not think that the Government should draw up criteria for design—that must be for individual developers and their architects—but there is a need for better design that is seen to be friendly. Architectural expression is moving in that direction. The quality of building today is far better than it was 30 or 40 years ago—one has only to look at the Department of the Environment's office to realise that—but there is still more to be done. We need to make town centre developments friendly.

I did not agree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish when he referred to local authorities assembling quantities of land and being seen as the landowners, if that is what he meant. There is, however, a role for local authorities to be the leaders in partnerships with the private sector that assemble land and create development opportunities in town centres for retail use. I entirely agree with those who have argued that town centres require co-ordinated management; I return to the point that I made a moment ago. Not only is town centre management, to which hon. Members have rightly referred, required. A proper partnership must be created between local authorities and shopkeepers, the lessees, and the landowners, the lessors.

If landowners simply seek to extract the highest possible rents from their premises, they will in the end sap vitality from the trading units. It is necessary to encourage landowners to look at the longer term, to the advantages of a buoyant shopping centre with longer-term rent growth and improvement in the value of their investments. They must consider it in a holistic sense, rather than on the basis of individual units, as has been done in the past. There is no encouragement for a landowner to look long term if the shop owners next door are pursuing a short-term policy. We must bring everybody together—the diverse landowners as well as the diverse lessees, the local authorities, the chambers of commerce and all other interested bodies—to seek to create a unified approach to the sustenance of the town centre.

In bringing more people into town centres, we need to allow shopkeepers to provide a better price structure because of the greater throughput of goods. The introduction of security cameras in the high streets is an important development. It has certainly been extremely important in my area of Bromsgrove. Above all, the shop owners, the lessees, must ensure that they provide a good service. It is quite useless us talking about the way in which we want to see town centres develop if the shopkeepers themselves do not work to produce a friendly service for their customers, quality goods and the right approach to retailing.

Street cleaning must be examined carefully because dirty streets put people off. It may be appropriate to encourage public transport in certain places and to appoint a town centre manager to co-ordinate the shopping centre as a whole. The Select Committee felt that progress could be made in all those areas.

There is clear evidence that people want town centres to survive and that market forces can, through the planning system, be channelled to meet the challenge of decaying centres. We must avoid urban decay by ensuring that our town centres fight back. We have the opportunity to achieve that. If we leave it much longer, that chance will have been lost for all time.

8.2 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I shall begin by referring to the shop mobility scheme, which was mentioned earlier, and give the House the very good news that, while just one district council in Berkshire is at present run by the Liberal Democrats with an overall majority, that same council, Newbury district council, has introduced a shop mobility scheme. I welcome the support for shop mobility schemes expressed by Conservative Members.

I also welcome the Government's change in attitude to megastores, which have sprung up so often outside our town centres. As other hon. Members have said, that change of attitude has come somewhat too late. There is no doubt that most people believe that the existing number of megastores, except in one or two rare instances, is sufficient to meet the demand from the public and that those still in the pipeline are excessive and well beyond the public's needs.

For far too long, the Government have been siding with the major shopping centre developers in moving retailing into the green-field sites out of our town centres. In reply to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason), that move cannot be blamed on the local authorities, which have been hampered by the Government's planning guidance and the Government's bias towards out-of-town centres, which was prevalent before the past few weeks and months.

Three areas of our national life have suffered as a result of the growth of out-of-town shopping centres. First, the town centres and especially the small retailers in them have suffered a loss of business as a result of the vast increase in the number of megastores. Secondly, those who do not have their own cars have suffered, especially the poorest members of our community—the elderly and often the unemployed. Such people have in some cases been deprived of adequate shopping facilities. What is more, because they are on the whole the poorest members of the community, they are most in need of the cheapest prices in the very shops to which they are unable to travel—the megastores in the old green-field sites. Thirdly, the environment and the general quality of life have suffered.

Two aspects of the environment have been hit particularly hard. The role of town centres as hubs of social life has been diminished, creating many problems as a result of an increase in the crime rate. There are now greater opportunities for crime in our town centres as they become deserted in the evening and fewer people are there during the day to watch out for what is going on. Our intensified car culture, supported by the Thatcher era, has meant much more air pollution, not least due to the use of cars for getting to out-of-town centres. Shopping out of town has increased congestion and traffic pollution, at great cost to the environment.

The shift in policy announced in the Government's response to the report of the Environment Select Committee is generally encouraging. I appreciate in particular the Secretary of State's contribution in helping

to bring about that change of heart. I must make, however, one or two qualifications while welcoming the change in the Government's latest position.

I am concerned that the Government are not going far enough with their changes to PPG 6, as other hon. Members have said. Indeed, there is considerable cross-party agreement on what continues to be wrong with the Government's policies. The onus has been placed on local authorities to prove that an out-of-town centre would be damaging and that the retail facilities can be offered in the town. I believe that the onus should be on the developers to prove that there is a real need for an out-of-town shopping centre, not only that such a shopping centre cannot be provided in the town. The Government have softened their line on that matter, but concerns remain that the burden of proof has not been and must be properly shifted on to the developers.

I also question the basic assumption that, just because a large new shopping centre may be profitable, it is automatically desirable simply because the large chain stores and developers wish to see it go ahead. The smaller retailers hold a very important place in this nation of shopkeepers and they, too, deserve fair consideration.

I stress once again the importance that the Government should be placing on the flats-over-shops scheme. I was promoting that scheme before the Government took it up, which I welcomed. I am only sorry that it did not prove as successful as it might have been had the Government been prepared to provide greater grants to enable the scheme to work properly.

Town centres need local residents as well as shoppers if they are to be centres of vitality and viability, as the Government have suggested. Transforming offices over shops into flats has several advantages. There would be added security in town centres as people return to live there and walk around the streets in the evening after the shoppers have gone home. It would also be advantageous to the town centre retail trade, because customers would be close at hand, and therefore more likely to want to shop in town centre shops. There is an advantage in that the need for transport is reduced. That is of particular interest to people who do not have their own transport. Town centres are often the best places to live for the elderly or for those who, for one reason or another, cannot afford or do not wish to have their own transport.

Finally, and just as important, those areas produce a ready supply of cheap rented accommodation. We are all aware of the importance of that. A more vigorous promotion of the flats-over-shops scheme would benefit town centre retail businesses and it would make a great contribution to the homelessness problem. In essence, it would improve the overall quality of life in our town centres.

Car parking is also an important part of the problem. We must improve the quality of car parking and not just the quantity of spaces available in our town centres. Simply building more car parks will not solve the problem. I am sure that we are all aware of how reluctant people are to use multi-storey car parks rather than road-level car parks. By the very nature of things, it is very often impossible in our town centres to provide more road-level car parking. Because of pedestrianisation schemes, which may be of great benefit to retailers, road-level car parking has often been reduced.

Where multi-storey car parks are the only option, they must be properly lit. They must be covered by closed circuit television. We may even need security guards to remove not just crime, but the fear of crime. That is the only way to encourage the proper use of multi-storey car parks.

We must also encourage the use of car parking spaces at ground level in our town centres for short-term shopping visits rather than for commuter use whereby commuters park their cars at 8.30 am, leave them in one space throughout the day, and then take them out as the shops close.

The Government have an opportunity to consider schemes to encourage businesses to, in turn, encourage their employees to consider car sharing, to make more use of cycles or public transport and to make use of park-and-ride schemes wherever they are available. Such schemes would free up spaces that are currently being used by commuters, to allow them to be used by shoppers for short-term parking.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the Government's change of heart. We are only sorry that it is so guarded and has come so late.

8.12 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I am grateful to the Environment Select Committee and to the Government for the opportunity to discuss out-of-town and inner-city-centre shopping. By its very nature, that is a subject on which we all consider ourselves to be experts because we all shop—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford) *indicated dissent.*

Dr. Twinn: Obviously, my hon. Friend the Minister tries to avoid doing the shopping as much as possible. However, as a result of the Jopling reforms, Back Benchers find themselves with slightly more time and our wives have probably exploited the situation, so we are perhaps experiencing more shopping than used to be the case.

The subject is not so easy as some of our constituents may believe. Whenever a new superstore is proposed, my postbag is full of letters saying that the proposal is ridiculous and that we have far too many such stores. The letters ask why on earth we need another superstore in the area. I am often asked why people cannot be content to use the existing shops in Enfield town or Edmonton Green in my constituency, but the truth is that they abandon such places: people who have cars—two thirds of households now have cars—drive out and park in the flat car parks beside the big superstores because those places are very convenient.

I suspect that much of the unease about the subject arises not from the fact that the new retail parks are being developed, but because people feel slightly guilty about the decline of the existing town centres which, as hon. Members have rightly said, people feel great affection for and affinity with and in which they enjoy shopping.

There is also considerable concern about the loss of green-field sites. As an outer London suburban Member, I am aware of the great concern if there is a threat to the green-field sites surrounding London. However, I am also greatly concerned when we lose brown-field sites in my constituency where once manufacturing thrived and where

[Dr. Twinn]

it would thrive again, if large supermarkets were not built on those sites, because the area now has assisted area status once again and those areas would be attracting inward development.

There is a great problem. As I am a planner, the House will not be surprised if I support the concept that there should be planning of retail provision. However, if there is to be planning, people must make up their minds about what is required. That involves councillors and my former colleagues, planning officers. Some of my former students must make up their minds about exactly what they want for their areas.

From my observations of planning over the years, I believe that councils have been rather loth to make up their minds categorically about what they want for their areas. There are several problem areas. Local authorities have had mixed feelings, because they did not want to lose retailers from their local authority areas. If a large retailer threatens to go somewhere else, the temptation is to agree to a planning permission within a local authority area although, at heart, some of those councillors and planning officers would rather the retailer stayed in the centre. Although that is not actually a form of blackmail, it is a difficult decision for local authorities to make. It does not matter which party is in control of the authority; the decision is very difficult. I sympathise with the councillors, but that position has led to the confusion that surrounds the subject.

There has been a great feeling among councillors and planning officers that even if they were to have a firm policy—a straight no to out-of-town shopping—the planning appeals system would deliver a firm yes as soon as the appeal went through. That has not always been put to the test because the fear of that happening has meant that authorities have agreed to something with which they perhaps would rather not have agreed. I welcome the Government's shift in emphasis to return more power to local councillors so that they can make up their own minds about exactly what they want in respect of retailing in their areas.

The biggest problem in terms of planning for retailing has been the lack of long-term strategic planning, although not in a regional context. Although the regional problem is important, the structure plan, development plan and local plan system is fairly cumbersome and it takes a considerable time. In that regard, we may be talking about development plans which were developed eight, nine or even 10 years ago and in respect of which decisions are now being made.

As we are now to have unitary authorities, those authorities may be too small physically to have responsibility to decide where out-of-town shopping should be located because out of town may be beyond a unitary authority's boundaries. We may need a regional system to provide a proper strategic approach to planning.

That problem is easily overcome with good will. The real problem is that councillors have not taken a long-term strategic view about what they want for retailing in their areas. Norwich, a Labour-controlled authority, has been cited as a good example. In the post-war years, it has stood out like a beacon as a town with a fairly clear view of what it wants. It has not made many mistakes, and in planning circles Norwich is lauded as a fine example of what can be achieved.

However, Norwich is a stand-alone city in a rural area. That makes it a little easier to plan than a London borough which is cheek by jowl with another London borough or perhaps cheek by jowl with another county as my constituency is with regard to Essex and Middlesex. Those historical rivalries continue even when it comes to planning. One cannot look over the border very clearly.

Some of the problems with the decline of city centres have to do with the failure of local authorities to decide what should happen in their areas. It is an unpopular subject today, but part of the problem is that road plans were not implemented. As a result, towns were not attractive locations for retailing or as places for people to drive into to do the shopping. The stark fact facing all of us, all local authorities and all retailers, is that people choose to do their major bulk shopping by car.

I remember the days, under a Labour Government, when I was a town planning lecturer. I had a mortgage, and when my car broke down I had to decide whether to pay the mortgage or to repair my car. Of course, I kept the house, which was a reasonable decision. I used to cycle to work and to Sainsburys. I probably broke the highway code on many occasions by balancing four carrier bags on my handlebars coming back—I was pushing the bicycle, of course. These days, with two children and a lot more packaging, I am not sure that we could get our carload of shopping on to two, three, or even four bicycles. Nor do I particularly want to do so in a busy life.

Like my constituents, I am schizophrenic when it comes to shopping. I like the town centre, but when it comes to going to Tesco, Sainsbury's, Safeway or Waitrose, I choose to go to a convenient location with free parking in good, well-lit car parks, hand my card over, take all my shopping back in boxes and bags to the car and drive away again. If I went to Enfield town, I would have to queue for a parking place. If I went to Edmonton Green, I would not have to queue, but I would have to pay. The car parks are a long way from the shops and involve the use of lifts—when they are working—and possibly even the deposit of a coin to take my trolley away. There is a mental barrier to all of those.

Local councils have to think more clearly about what they want for their towns. That may well mean making some politically incorrect decisions, which might include better roads and free parking schemes. We cannot avoid public demand in deciding any of that and it is no good any of us feeling that we can fool the market, which is the demand for the kind of shopping that people want. I do not think that councillors, Members of Parliament or planning officers are the best judges of what is demanded.

We should be concentrating on finding ways to boost existing centres. It is not for us to rule out the possibility of out-of-town or out-of-city sites, but we need to make existing centres more competitive because, although one third of households do not have cars, in constituencies such as mine the figure would be much higher as there are many elderly people and, I regret to say, quite a number of unemployed even after the remarkable improvement in the unemployment figures announced today. Those people need shops close by.

I want Edmonton Green to thrive and I want new shops to come into my area, but I also want choice. For me, one of the great advantages of town-centre sites over the retail parks is the variety of shops. It is convenient to go to a single-store site, or to one of the multiple parks, where all the chain stores and shoe shops are lined up together, but

it has a limited appeal. I like to go to a city centre, where there is a variety of different types of shop. With different rents in different streets, we can have shops which would find it impossible to compete in the new out-of-town centres.

There is something very lively and—for someone who believes in the market system—vibrant in a town centre where a variety of different landlords are prepared to accept different rents and lease conditions, which means a greater range of shops. Some of the failures of existing town centres are caused when ownership is concentrated in too few hands. Edmonton Green is a classic example. It is wholly owned and run by the council, and is good proof that local authorities are not good organisations to run commercial centres.

I have a strong affinity with wanting town centres to survive, but local authorities have a responsibility when it comes to car parking. As hon. Members have pointed out, parking is one of the key factors affecting our perception of where to shop. City and town centres have to compete, and for my money that means that parking must be free. If local authorities expect to get income from car parks, they are fooling themselves, and so are the retailers. They must get together and sort out the problem.

At the same time, car parks must be well lit and secure. As joint chairman of the all-party lighting group, hon. Members will hardly be surprised to hear that I am delighted that there is all-party support for better lighting. Our very strong group in the House will be writing to every Member who has spoken out today in favour of better lighting, inviting them to join our group.

In the end, it is not down to local authorities, but to retailers to sort themselves out. They have to help themselves. They can get involved with car parking and can talk to local authorities to ensure that it is easily accessible, free and of a much higher standard than hitherto. They can get together to appoint town centre managers—a development that I welcome. The Select Committee on the Environment highlighted how experienced and useful managers can be, especially if they come from the retail sector rather than from local authorities. They bring acute commercial awareness to running town centres, are trusted by shopkeepers and shop owners and are able to work together with the local authority. I would certainly support that.

Shopkeepers and owners can also help to invest in refurbishment and not merely in their own buildings. That is terribly important, as no one will want to go shopping in a run-down centre or one where shops have lost their enthusiasm to trade, the window displays are not changed properly, they are not well lit and shop assistants are unfriendly. To a major retailer, all those factors are very important and a basic part of any retailer's training.

Shopkeepers and owners can also get together with the local authority and help to refurbish streets in town centres. They can invest some of their own money. Many local authorities are already approaching retailers to do just that. Retailers rightly say, "But we already pay rates." The trouble is that the rates no longer go to the local authority. Whereas before there was a contract between the local authority and the retailer and some pressure could be brought to bear on the authority, the uniform business rate means that that has gone. That was one of the big disadvantages that Conservative Members clearly recognised when it was introduced. I understand that retailers may be loth to invest their own money, but if they are genuinely committed to remaining in town centres they must consider contributing to refurbishment.

The Government must consider ways to encourage retailers to do that. This point is more for the Treasury than for Environment Ministers. Capital allowances could form a useful way of encouraging retailers to invest, not in their premises, but in the streets outside. Some items of spending already attract a capital allowance of a third over eight years, but that is not a lot when one is looking at the bottom line every year.

For example, street lighting attracts a capital allowance, as does street furniture, signs, bus shelters, traffic lights—and even parking meters, although the Treasury could knock those off the list and gain great popular applause. Widening pavements, putting in pedestrian crossings and taxi ranks, and investing in car parks do not attract capital allowances, even under the present arrangement of one third over eight years. The Treasury and the Government could well afford to look again at how capital allowances work, as a positive way of encouraging partnership in our town centres. If support for the capital allowance system is all that comes out of the Select Committee report, it will be a great step forward.

I will stop at this point to allow other hon. Members to contribute, but I must repeat how important this subject is and how important it is for us not to jump on to the bandwagon of being anti-car. Although the public write to tell us that there should not be any out-of-town centres, the very next moment they get in their cars and go and do their shopping there.

8.28 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): My first involvement in the issue of out-of-town shopping was in 1976, when I was the transport campaigner for Friends of the Earth, and I appeared as a witness at a public inquiry in Nottingham. It is quite striking that the arguments which I put on behalf of Friends of the Earth at that inquiry were, in essence, the same as the arguments expressed in the report of the Select Committee, and those arguments have been accepted in much of the Government's response. It is an encouraging and enjoyable experience to move from the fringe of political argument to the centre ground, and it is even more encouraging to have done so without having to change one's views in the process.

There has been a transformation of attitude about the issue, and about the underlying transport and environmental questions which it has raised. I welcome the profound change of heart which seems to have taken place within the Government during the past year to 18 months. The Government are in what might be described as the denial stage of bereavement, as they lay their previous and much-loved policies to rest. To hear the speeches of Conservative Members, it would seem that the planning decisions and disasters of the past 15 years had nothing to do with the policy of the Government, or with the people who have held ministerial rank during that period.

I do not want to destroy the cosy consensus which existed in the Committee and has coloured much of the debate, but it would be appropriate if the Government were at some point to say sorry for the damage their

[Mr. John Denham]

policies did during the 1980s and the early 1990s to so many town and city centres. That damage was done by what was in essence unplanned development.

It was not, by the way, just the Government who participated in what happened. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) outline the Liberal Democrats' position on the issue. Those of us in the Southampton area might have less reason to complain about ou-of-town shopping if the Liberal Democrats had not approved the Hedge End shopping centre in the mid-1980s when they controlled Eastleigh council. They then spent the next ten years campaigning against it, and saying how bad out-of-town shopping was for the existing town centres. Some consistency in planning policies is necessary.

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman may not have heard me make the point that, in practice, local authorities were very much constrained by Government regulation and by Government guidance. There was very little that local authorities could do about the huge proliferation of out-of-town shopping centres, which occurred, sometimes, much to their dismay.

Mr. Denham: I believe that local authorities retain the right to oppose developments which are damaging, and to test that within the Government system. The Hedge End development was not the only example of which the Committee was made aware where local authorities had taken decisions within their boundaries, which, as the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) said, sometimes had an impact on somebody else's shopping centre.

I am not convinced that the Government's response to the Select Committee report has really taken on board the Committee's recommendations on regional guidance for shopping centres. The Government seem to have interpreted our report as simply talking about huge regional shopping centres.

My view of our discussions in Committee was that we thought that a large number of out-of-town shopping centres had implications across district and county council boundaries, and if any such projects came forward in the future, we would need clear regional planning guidance on shopping. I hope that the Minister can answer that point, as the response that we have had so far from the Government has fallen well short of the commitment that the Committee was looking for on that issue.

Out-of-town shopping developments in the Southampton area, and incremental developments along the M27, have caused damage in a number of different ways. First, trade has been diverted away from the existing shopping centres. Secondly—this is often not remarked upon—there is the sheer cost in time and resources to local authorities, which have faced constant battles to resist unwanted out-of-town shopping developments. Some of those inquiries have been lost, although Southampton was successful in defeating the Adanac park development, which was planned to have nearly 1 million sq ft of shopping area, and would have done enormous damage to the city.

Such a planning inquiry consumes enormous resources, as councils must pay QCs to represent them. Many of those costs would have been unnecessary had there been stronger Government planning guidance during the 1980s and early 1990s.

The third example of the damage done by planning policies is one which, on reading the report after a few months, I do not think the Committee emphasised sufficiently. The uncertainties of town centre retailers and property owners caused by the threat of out-of-town shopping was a major effect on undermining the confidence of the companies and investors in the existing town centres. Even where a retailer or a property company was committed to remaining in a town or city centre, the fear that another out-of-town development would get approval this year or next year was a major disincentive to investment.

Looking again at the report, I wish now that we had stressed clearly that we need to produce a consistent and reliable framework for retail planning which can give investors from the private sector long-term confidence in their investment decisions. They would then know that, if they choose to invest in an existing town or city centre, they will have 10, 15 or 20 years of security, which will enable their investment to be well rewarded.

Resisting further out-of-town shopping development is only half the answer to the problem, and revitalising town and city centres is the other key point. Investment will be central to that revitalisation, the vast bulk of which will come from the private sector. I do not believe that money will materialise unless the private sector can plan with confidence.

The second element which the private sector is clearly looking for is long-term confidence in partnerships which can be established between private investors and the public sector, and particularly the local authorities. Private sector investors will need to know—not just for six months or a year—that there will be stability in planning policies, and that there is a clear vision of how each town and city will develop. They will want to know that there will be an effective and well-resourced structure for town centre management in the long term.

The private sector will also want to have confidence in the ability of the public sector to deliver the essential elements of a town or city centre revival which the private sector, retailers and property owners cannot provide. Those include improved public transport, upgraded car parking, an improved street environment and the effective co-ordination of crime prevention.

In those areas, contributions can be secured from the private sector, but it will be the responsibility of the public sector—the local council in particular—to organise and provide those elements. The private sector must know in the long term that local authorities will have the resources, which is very much a matter for the Government, and the commitment, which is very much a matter for the local authorities, to play that role effectively over a long time.

It is also important that we find the means of taking the public with us as the town and city centre revivals take place. My experience in Southampton showed that it was difficult to persuade many members of the public that new investment and new retail centres in Southampton were necessary, when, in the middle of a recession, there were clearly a large number of empty shop units being unused. It was not uncommon to open a local newspaper and read a letter asking why we needed more shops, when there were empty shops already.

It is important that we find ways of explaining to the public that, if we want town and city centres to revive, we must allow them to grow and develop. With the possible

exception of the very historic town centres, they will change, as they have always changed throughout history. Each part of the process will change the shape, activity and nature of the town or city centre.

It is important to find ways of involving local residents, shoppers, potential shoppers and users of leisure and cultural activities in the planning of local town centres so that they have the confidence in the vision that the public and private sector partnership is putting forward.

A proven example of that in my constituency was the decision to work with the local institute of higher education to transform a not first-rate department store into a major educational building in the city centre for use by an institution of higher education. Because of its location, it brings together a cultural and educational quarter involving theatres, arts centres, art galleries and now a major educational building. It brings into the city centre many young people—a new group of the population that had not previously been actively involved in the life of the city centre.

Such changes will be essential in many towns and cities. It is not simply a matter of better shops and improved access to them, although that is part of the solution. Our vision for city centres must embrace the whole life of the city centre and the various reasons why people want to go there. After all, it is that type of attraction which out-of-town centres cannot provide. They may provide shops a car park next to them, but developers will not build new theatres, art galleries and educational institutions by motorways. Those city centre activities should be closely linked to the development of retailing and city and town centre development.

Having mentioned some of the pressures that Southampton has been under, may I make a few points about the future? I am fortunate in that my city is uniquely placed to resist the pressures of out-of-town development, because it has such a large development area next to the city centre. Through that, we can compete on more direct terms than many towns and cities with the attractions of out-of-town shopping.

One phase of development is already committed, providing large, open shopping areas that will sell the type of goods often only available in out-of-town venues, at an investment of some £30 million. I hope that, in the near future, there will be further announcements of significant investment in retail development in the centre of Southampton. It shows that, with some confidence on the part of local authorities and the willingness to plan clearly, it is possible to attract substantial investment back into city centres and secure their long-term future.

I hope that the Minister will say more about the need to consolidate the town centre management process. Southampton is one of many local authorities that have appointed a town centre manager, but, as yet, the system for town centre management goes nowhere near providing the sound basis for the partnership between town centre retailers, property owners and local authorities which will be necessary to make it truly effective.

As our Committee found in its inquiry, and as we find in Southampton, even on the current basis, town centre managers can achieve a great deal, but we shall need more reliable sources of funding that tie in all the retailers within a centre and avoid the problems of free riders, if the potential of town centre management is to be realised.

Although the Government said that they are looking into that question, we must push them to respond more positively. The single regeneration budget is not an adequate response to the problem, because its application is patchy. In the summer, the Committee will look again in detail at the single regeneration budget and its application to town centre revitalisation. We cannot have a lottery in which some local authorities receive money to develop their town centres while others do not, which is what the single regeneration budget implies. We need a consistent mechanism that is available to all towns and cities that need funds for town centre management.

Finally, I renew the plea made by the Chairman of the Committee. A swift response from the Government on the matters which they say they are considering is absolutely essential. I return to the fundamental point: that we must have an environment that encourages confidence in the long-term future of towns and cities, and encourages investors to believe that they can afford to invest long-term, knowing that they are making a sensible decision. The new planning guidance and decisions on the funding of town centre management need to be in place at the earliest possible opportunity if that investment confidence is to be achieved in all the towns and cities that need investment.

8.44 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): The Environment Select Committee's inquiry, "Shopping Centres and their Future", generated by far the greatest interest of any inquiry in this Parliament. I pay tribute to one of its former Chairmen, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), who was instrumental in bringing us all together and whose input into the report was significant. I also pay tribute to his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and to the current Chairman, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), whose speech we heard this evening.

I am one of the few chartered surveyors in the House, so the inquiry had particular relevance to me. I represent an area that is 80 per cent. designated in planning terms in one way or another, so my planning problems are particularly acute, not least with the new wave of out-of-town applications which the smaller market towns are beginning to experience now that the recession is coming to an end. The inquiry was therefore of particular interest to me.

In Victorian and Edwardian times, altruistic landowners invested significant sums in our towns and cities and, together with some conscientiously minded citizens, produced what used to be called "civic pride". Towns and cities used to compete with each other as to which had the best architecture and recreational facilities and which was the tidiest. Unfortunately, the two world wars came along, and many of those magnificent towns and cities took an awful battering.

The business rate was introduced after the second world war, and many of our towns and cities were caned by local authorities, who could use the business sector as an easy source of finance. It was not until this Government came along and introduced the universal business rate that we began to get some sanity back and encourage businesses to consider investing in town centres.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

As many hon. Members have said, investment is the key to encouraging the vitality and viability of our town and city centres. That investment must be channelled in a way that does not benefit just the individual shop owner.

One of the key recommendations of the inquiry was to form town centre management schemes. By those schemes, all the partners can be brought together. Those include the local authority, which must play a leading role, but also the retailers, landlords, consumers, the highway authority and many others.

In order to be brought together by a town centre manager, that requires funding. Much mention has been made this evening of how a mechanism might be adopted for that. I favour the top slicing of the universal business rate to fund that mechanism, because that would be fair and would relate to the size, viability and turnover of the business in a particular town. It would also stop those who do not currently wish to take part in such schemes—so-called backsliders.

I am not in favour of the scheme advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) of capital allowances, as they bring about the wrong results. People do things that they would not otherwise do, purely for tax reasons.

As a number of hon. Members have said, town centre viability and vitality can be brought about in a number of ways, not least of which is the willingness of businesses to provide service. I recently went to the United States, where I found that every shopkeeper wants to provide a service. It is no trouble for them to lift heavy goods out into somebody's car. Nothing is too much trouble. In restaurants, one is offered more water and so on before one has to ask for it.

I often find that kind of service lacking in the smaller shops in our smaller towns. Sometimes when I enter a shop, I get the impression that the shopkeeper does not want me to be there; he or she does not want to serve me. We must overcome that sort of attitude. Shops which are part of large retail chains have solved that problem by running employee management schemes to train their employees to look after the customers. It is the small shops which must adopt a better attitude to customer service.

Town centre managers could improve town centres in other ways. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton said, it is largely a matter of self-help. Managers could improve the safety of shopping centres by introducing closed-circuit television. They could provide better facilities, so that disabled people can shop more easily. They could examine whether the local public transport network is near the shops and enables disabled people to reach them easily. Perhaps there is a granny tripper just inside the entrance to a shop which shoppers have to lift prams or buggies over in order to access that shop. Managers can do many simple things to make the shops in their town centres more attractive to the consumer.

Unless we seize every available opportunity to improve our town centres, people will take the easy option: they will travel by car to out-of-town shopping centres. I do not think that planning guidance note 13, which tries to restrict the number of car parking spaces artificially, is the right way of ensuring the vitality and viability of our town centres. Easy and convenient car parking spaces should be provided near town centres, so that people will choose to shop in the town centre rather than go out of town.

It is totally wrong for central Government to give prescriptive guidance to local authorities about charging for car parking. Individual local authorities or towns should be allowed to charge nothing for car parking if they believe that that will help them to compete with out-of-town shopping centres.

I wholeheartedly welcome the Government's response to the Committee's inquiry. I hope that local authorities will look carefully at all applications for out-of-town shopping centres. There is no doubt that out-of-town shopping developments have put stress and strain on our existing city and regional town centres.

I think that the sequential test that was mentioned by many hon. Members this evening is the right way to go. If there is an available site within the town centre, it should be the first priority. If no such site exists, developers could then look at edge-of-town sites. Edge-of-town sites are those to which people can easily walk from the town centre; there should be no confusion between edge-of-town and out-of-town sites. The least preferred option would be an out-of-town development which could be reached by car.

I believe that developers are beginning to target smaller market towns for significant out-of-town development applications. The local authority in Stow-on-the-Wold is considering an application for a development which will cover 10.25 acres, which is more than one quarter the size of that market town.

Stow-on-the-Wold is a beautiful town in the middle of the Cotswolds; it is a real gem. There is no question but that, if that development goes ahead, it will radically change the entire character of that town forever. I do not think that we want to denude little market towns of their traditional retailers. The butchers, the bakers and the other little shops provide excellent services in small towns. Even if they do the things I have recommended, they would be put under great pressure by a massive supermarket development.

Let us have no illusions; the proposed development is an out-of-town development. The average person could not walk to the development site. Therefore, it should be considered according to out-of-town criteria.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), who is currently not in his place, mentioned the problem of regional planning. If he looks carefully at the Government's response to the inquiry, he will see that the Government have made it clear that the existing regional planning guidance notes can deal with difficult situations. However, we must encourage local authorities to work together. I hope that they will consult with each other about large out-of-town development proposals. As one drives around the country, one often sees a controversial or bad development which is situated on the edge of a local planning authority's area.

We must also encourage the formulation of better statistics and better methodology for framing impact studies for edge-of-town and out-of-town developments. That methodology is still being developed, and even the top professionals in the field do not agree on how impact studies should be carried out.

I was dismayed when my local authority, Cotswold district council, decided to challenge a major edge-of-town development. Its case was upheld by the Planning Inspectorate, but costs were awarded against the council because its impact study was criticised. As the study had been conducted by a major firm in the City, that ruling seems a little harsh. Decisions such as that will weaken the council's resolve to challenge other unsuitable out-of-town developments—of which another three have been proposed as a result of the Inspectorate's decision.

I hope that the Minister will consider the question of awarding costs against local authorities very carefully. They are the local democratically elected bodies, and if they choose to fight particular planning applications—provided they do not have a wholly spurious case—I think that there is an argument for not readily awarding costs against them.

The Committee inquiry dealt at some length with the problem of planning gain. The fundamental principle that no development should be granted planning permission merely because of planning gain is entirely correct. The Government supported that principle in their response to our inquiry.

We must be very careful about planning gain. There is nothing wrong with it and, provided it is associated with a good development, I can see no reason why local authorities should not be entitled to ask for a reasonable level of gain in order to support the local community which will maintain that development. However, I think that we must ensure that the planning gain relates directly to the development and not to some other spurious cause that the local authority may inflict on the developer.

I urge my hon. Friend to look at section 106 agreements. A large development in my constituency is currently under appeal with the planning inspectorate. I do not intend to argue whether the decision should be in favour of or against that development for a retail park on the edge of the market town of Tewkesbury. I was keen to ensure that the local authority applied the section 106 agreement meticulously. That agreement refers to the range of merchandise which can be sold from a factory outlet.

In the past, huge supermarkets or regional shopping centres have been allowed to sell a range of goods—perhaps they are food-related—but then the developers have applied a year or two later to open a chemist's shop or a post office. That immediately jeopardises the future of the local chemists and post offices. Supermarkets often apply at a later date to build petrol stations in their complexes. One can see that the development in Stow-on-the-Wold intends to do that. Its plans include an access road, and I bet that, in two or three years, the developers will apply to instal a petrol retail unit.

The section 106 agreements must be made to work. They must be rigorously upheld in the planning system, so that we do not get the so-called planning creep, whereby an application is made for one type of development, but gradually, over a period, it ends up as a totally different development.

I have highlighted a few points in the Select Committee report. It is an extremely important report. Every town and every city will be different, so it is impossible—as the Government made clear in their response to our inquiry—to be totally prescriptive in the planning system.

I am delighted that, at long last, the necessity to ensure the vitality and viability of our town centres has been recognised. We do not want to end up with ghost towns and cities. We want living towns, with people living above shops. We want recreational facilities, and, above all, we want people shopping and using those towns so that they are alive and dynamic, and will progress into the 21st century and expand, as they have throughout history.

9 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): This is a valuable and worthwhile report which is a credit to the Committee, its previous Chairman, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), the current Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, under whose deputy chairmanship I served on the Committee many years ago, and its current Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). I trust that the Government will take early and significant action on its recommendations.

I am bound to say, however, that I take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish on two of his particular concerns. They are first and foremost his attack—it was no less than that—on activity shoppers, as he described them. I take issue with his denigration of activity shoppers, because I must confess to being one, as are my family. He presented the horror scenario of the nightmare family driving up the motorway to the Lake District getting some fresh air and scenery and then descending on the local high street and buying things for which they might not have much use, ultimately. Although that might be a horror for my hon. Friend, to me it is nothing short of a domestic idyll. It is an ideal way to spend a day with one's family, and I do not think it ought to be knocked.

Similarly, I take issue with him on his attack on fast food joints on the high street. Many of us who, seeking refuge for ourselves from our children, succumb to their blandishments and take them into such places with a great deal of mutual benefit to all concerned. The two in Wembley high street rely on the likes of me and others precisely for their living, and the shops around them similarly benefit. Wembley high street has suffered particularly in recent years from the recession and the absence of adequate planning controls, and there are times when the presence of such fast-food places is a major magnet to the high street, so I take issue with my hon. Friend on those points.

The Committee and its report in its entirety are a valuable contribution to the debate. It is a timely contribution too, because in all too many of our constituencies we are living with the consequence of a market that has not been regulated effectively over the past 15 years. It is good to hear so many Conservative Members converted to the benefits of regulating and seeking to control and channel the dynamism of the market. I notice that a number of Conservative Members are now seeking to go back on their belated conversions; nevertheless that is how it will appear to those innocent readers of the record of this debate or any who happen to drop in on the proceedings tonight.

Time and again, Conservative Members recognise the force of the argument that market forces alone, in determining where retail parks and megastores spring up, are not an adequate way of preserving the public good.

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

We need to make sure that our planning regulations and directives ensure social and economic responsibility. Corporate responsibility also has a role to play.

It is important also that there have been contributions to the debate from a number of hon. Members who do not represent rural constituencies. The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) in particular, who sits on the Committee, referred to "my market towns". A number of us who represent urban constituencies feel somewhat excluded from this rather proprietorial attitude towards one's constituency and its geographical territory.

I do not have any market towns in my constituency. I do, however, have a number of urban and suburban shopping arcades. Those urban and suburban arcades are equally important to those of us who have such places in our constituencies. They have been damaged of late, as have our high streets, by the profusion of superstores, megastores and retail parks.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I rise merely to invite the hon. Gentleman to any of my market towns. I care passionately for them and the hon. Gentleman is more than welcome to visit them because he will give the tourism effort an enormous boost.

Mr. Boateng: I shall take the hon. Gentleman up on that in the course of my activity shopping. The Boateng family will descend in great numbers on one of your market towns, and we look forward to you being there to greet us.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he should be addressing me.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury is similarly very welcome to one of my suburban arcades. We will be there to meet him, and when he visits such a suburban arcade, particularly the ones in Wembley park off Forty avenue, Preston road and East lane, he will find that there is considerable concern about the proliferation of megastores and retail parks on the North Circular road.

It is almost surreal that in successive weeks, major retail developments are opening along the North Circular road in vast numbers, no doubt at great expense to the shareholders concerned and no doubt also in the expectation of great profit, but it is difficult to see how there will be enough shoppers to fill those megastores. They are already draining from the surrounding areas of north-west London the lifeblood of the high streets, in Wembley and Harlesden in particular, and indeed, in the suburban shopping arcades that I have mentioned.

Hon. Members have drawn attention to the proliferation of charity shops. There are also boarded-up shops, and shops that are virtually derelict. The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) spoke of the importance of the high street as an historic centre for community life, and he is right; but in many areas the post office and the gas and electricity showrooms were once part of that history, and now they have gone. Their departure from the high street—as a result of policies supported by Conservative Members—has made a major contribution to the crisis that now affects many of our high streets, and the death of some of them.

I speak with some passion about local post offices. My area is by no means unique in this respect, but the Wembley post office on the high road has been closed. It has been transferred to one of the few remaining retail outlets on the high road, and another has sprung up in one of the megastores down the road. The Government should respond to such developments, and to others with which the report deals.

The single regeneration budget has been mentioned. I hope that it will be able to give much-needed assistance to the schemes and projects of local authorities that seek to revive our high streets. Such areas need a magnet for investment, and an infrastructure that is currently lacking in all too many instances.

I do not for a moment denigrate or ignore the contribution to regeneration made by city challenge in Harlesden, for example. As a public-private partnership works to build up the area, however, just down the road—off Scrubs lane—there are plans for another giant superstore to open. In the past two weeks, another superstore has opened at Brent Cross, within weeks of the opening of yet another 250 yards down the North Circular road.

We now have a mega-Safeway and a mega-Tesco, in addition to the mega-Safeways and mega-Tescos that have opened in Queensbury and further along the North Circular towards Edmonton, the mega-Tesco at Brent park and the mega-Sainsbury in Alperton. Superstore after superstore is being constructed. At some stage, a halt must be called, and we look to Government to do just that.

It is not enough to urge common sense on the Government—the kind of common sense that is contained in the report—in the expectation of possible action at some future date. We need an assurance now that action will be taken at an early stage, and we hope to receive it from the Minister.

The Chalk Hill estate in Brent provides a typical example of the time bomb contained in permissions already granted and in the pipeline. It is proposed to tear down some homes on the estate and to substitute a new megastore, in addition to those in the surrounding area that I have already mentioned. The planning game for the council is the financing of the estate's refurbishment and redevelopment. I understand the attraction of that to a council that is strapped for cash, but the result will be a further undermining of local shopping facilities. For those who live on the estate, the development will also raise the spectre of being decanted they know not where.

Taking away homes to build another megastore defies common sense. I therefore urge the Minister to look into the Chalk Hill development and to do all in his power to prevent it. By doing so, he will halt the decline of the local economy in that part of Wembley Park. By calling the attention of the council to the crisis of concern among the residents and shopkeepers of the area, the Minister will at least show such people that the Government are prepared to listen. I urge him to do just that. I also urge him to deny the council the permissions that it requires to develop the Book Centre site in Wembley. Failure to do that will only assist the council in its intention to redevelop the Chalk Hill estate.

This has been an important debate; we await the Minister's reply with interest—and trust that it will be a constructive and speedy one.

9.15 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I shall try to speak at high speed and in abbreviated form.

This is an interesting subject and report. Entitled "Shopping Centres and their Future", the report covers shopping policy, transport policy and—most important of all—urban policy. Because it combines those three policy areas it is a highly worthwhile investigation of the responsibilities covered by the Department of the Environment. It is thus important that the Secretary of State deal with the recommendations in the report.

It is clear from the report's comments on shopping policy that shopping is not a homogeneous activity. It all depends on who is shopping, when, and what for. There is bulk food shopping, there is buying one's Sunday paper in the local shop, there is DIY shopping and there is fresh food shopping—they are all different.

The importance that we attach to the traditional markets in our small towns and urban areas—not to mention larger centres such as Sheffield—is not to be denied. Markets sell fresh produce at reasonable prices, and they bring a certain vibrancy to the shopping experience. Recently, Chapeltown in my constituency urged the planning authority to allow the opening of a Saturday market, which is proving extremely popular.

In the other meaning of the word, the "market", however, does not necessarily offer the customer the widest possible choice. Increasingly the public are shopping in these huge out-of-town centres. In Sheffield, we know very well how fast this change is taking place. The development of the Meadowhall centre has transformed shopping habits in the area. We cannot assume that it offers more choice to the shopper. It does not. The shops there are all similar, selling similar goods. It is difficult to find specialist items in such places, or to obtain clothing in extremes of sizes. Shops often presume that one is between size 12 and 16, and if one is at either end of that scale, one has to go elsewhere for clothing. The Committee was strongly of the view that, in contrast, town and city centres offer flexibility, variety and—because they embrace cultural and leisure activities—interest.

The pressure to shift from car usage to public transport or non-car journeys will increase, driven by environmental policies, problems of air quality, congestion and the sheer unpleasantness of sitting in a car in a traffic jam on a hot sunny day. The public transport aspect of the Meadowhall development was well planned on an integrated basis, with British Rail opening a new station and the light rail Supertram being routed through Meadowhall. There is also car parking. Meadowhall may not like this, but car parks there are increasingly used for park-and-ride commuters who work in the city centre.

Finally, the Government must acknowledge serious flaws in some of their urban policies. I agree with encouraging more people to live in town centres, but the Government must recognise the role of local authorities in developing the sort of partnership proposals outlined in the report. Town centre management schemes need people, resources and planners. Many planning authorities have an acute shortage of the key people who are the driving force in getting private and public sector partnership schemes up and running.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) rightly pointed out the problem of relying on traditional urban development schemes and the single regeneration budget. The element of competition within them is extremely damaging when a town centre already faces an out-of-town threat. If the town or city centre proposal fails, that can add to declining morale among the people involved. I will be listening carefully to what the Minister has to say about these key urban policy issues.

9.23 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): This has been a good debate—almost a love-in, with hon. Members on both sides of the House pouring praise on the Select Committee's report and expressing their good wishes strongly in favour of the town and city centre.

I congratulate all the hon. Members involved in that excellent report on producing so much food for thought and debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) should be congratulated on his chairmanship of the Committee and on the way in which he introduced the debate. We heard excellent speeches from hon. Members who represent rural and urban areas.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) reminded us about the heritage of our towns and cities and the need to preserve the heritage of the countryside. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), who is a member of the Co-op movement, spoke about the importance of the retail sector. I congratulate him on his work in the all-party retail group.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) said that people want town centres to survive and that market forces need to be channelled through the planning process. The hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), who is not in his place, told us about his bicycling habits. I am sure that he is not the first Member to admit to being schizophrenic. He likes town centres, but prefers to shop in out-of-town developments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) told us that his views had not changed, despite being an adviser to Friends of the Earth in previous employment. He said that the city centre needs to be supported and developed. The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) told us about proposals to ruin his market town of Stow-on-the-Wold. We wish him success in opposing the application. I am sure that, if he has a word with his hon. Friend the Minister, the application could be called in at some future date.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), who is almost my Member of Parliament because I live in the constituency of Brent, East and sometimes have to shop in the arcades that he invited the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury to visit, took us on a tour of the north circular road and made a strong plea for homes rather than superstores.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), who is a member of the Select Committee, reminded us of the importance of town and city centres. She spoke about developments in Sheffield and said that the only in which we would get strong city and town centres was by the Government being prepared to put in a great deal of investment to support excellent councils such as the one in Sheffield.

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

In the House on 26 May 1994, the Minister's predecessor, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), set out the Government's policy, which has changed rapidly over the past 15 years. It was that town centres were to be the preferred location for most of our new shopping developments. He said that previous policies had had a dramatic effect on retail policy and especially on the development of town and city centres.

Every hon. Member who regularly attends Environment Question Time, which we had earlier today, is aware of hon. Members' concern about the changing nature of Government policy and about the fact that there is no clear guidance about precisely what should happen. The Government's present policy is as clear as mud. In the context of planning issues, the Secretary of State has turned the U-turn into an art. He has pirouetted 360 deg from his initial stance that out-of-town developments were the way forward for retail planning. To echo the plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Itchen, I hope that in his reply the Minister will apologise on behalf of himself and the Government for the way in which they have developed planning policy until recently.

Removing local authority power in these matters and granting a great number of applications on appeal has meant that developments have decimated our town and city centres. The Secretary of State and Ministers realised that it was time to reverse his discredited policy because that was the only way to limit the damage to that which has already occurred. The Opposition and local authority associations told the Government for some time that their policy was wrong.

The Secretary of State has said that he is now committed to

"using my planning powers to support local efforts to safeguard the vitality of towns and the economic viability of their retail centres in particular."

I welcome the assurances that local authorities are to be given the power to handle, without interference, applications for out-of-town developments, but good words are not enough. What the House and every hon. Member wishes to see is action by the Department of the Environment to ensure that, once passed, the guidance is carried into action.

The Independent of Monday 20 February reported that despite initiating a policy of there being no more superstore developments in out-of-town areas, the Department of the Environment plans to develop an edge-of-town superstore with parking for more than 300 cars in Cambridgeshire. It is no wonder that that has outraged not only local environmentalists but local residents. Campaigners pointed out that the move goes completely against the spirit of a new, greener Government planning policy.

Cambridge city council felt very strongly about the proposal and decided to turn down the application. The DOE's response to the superstore development was that it would provide more than 100 bicycle parking places—no doubt suitable for the hon. Member for Edmonton, when bicycling up the A10 to do his shopping.

How can we take seriously Ministers who, on the one hand, say that, through PPG 6 and PPG 13, they support town and city centres and want to curtail the development of superstores, while on the other are prepared to allow such developments to go ahead? A commitment to revise the PPGs was first made in 1990. That was designed to ensure that the guidance that the Government provided reflected the Government's environmental agenda. In the case of PPG 6 that meant a commitment to reduce the need to go shopping by car. The objectives of PPG 6 were

"to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres which serve the whole community and which provide a focus for retail development, where proximity of competing businesses facilities competition from which the consumers can benefit."

We welcome the announcement, made in response to the Select Committee's recommendations, that the Government will review PPG 6 and will also look at PPG 13. At the moment, it is only the lawyers who seem to be making most of the money out of the lack of clarity of PPG 6. I recently had lunch with the chairman of a very big retail company—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I do not know whether I should declare that in the Register of Members' Interests. It was not a very big lunch, but the company is a very big contributor to the Conservative party. It is as fed up with the Government as are some Conservative Members because of the Government's failure to be clear about planning policy.

Mr. Thomason: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that no out-of-town development took place and there were no substantial shopping centres built in the period from 1974 to 1979?

Mr. Vaz: I shall come in a moment to a report that I published only last year, but it is clear from all the statistics that the major growth in out-of-town shopping centres has occurred under this Government—promoted and supported by the Government until the U-turn that the Secretary of State initiated only two years ago.

The Select Committee laid down two very firm criteria, which the Labour party believes are fundamental cornerstones of any policy. First, retail proposals should not be given permission for developments outside a town or city if there is a suitable site available close to the centre. Secondly, the data from retail impact studies will be required to assess any threat of harmful damage to such town and city centres that the projects may cause. I agree with the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) that the onus should be placed firmly on the developers to show that the impact of their policies will not in any way have an effect on town and city centres.

In congratulating the Select Committee on its report, I have to say that I believe that it was very important that it made so many extensive visits to so many different parts of the country. In particular, I was delighted that the Committee visited Leicestershire to study the effects of the Fosse park and Shires developments. I know that the Minister will visit Leicester shortly. I hope that he will take the opportunity of looking at the city council's excellent work in the Shires centre. It is trying to promote the viability and vitality of the city centre.

I accept that it is no use having an intellectual discussion about out-of-town developments and about the fact that we are against them unless we are prepared to initiate policies that will mean that developers will invest in city and town centres. I was attracted to some of the proposals of hon. Members, especially that of the hon. Member for Edmonton, who talked about the need for the Treasury to consider capital allowances. The local authority has a duty to work in partnership with the

private sector to ensure that all the possibilities are explored. One should consider what may be provided outside a town or city centre only when those possibilities have been exhausted.

Last year, I published a report on the impact of out-of-town developments. I decided to undertake a survey to find out what was happening at local level. The results showed that 1,473 out-of-town developments were built between 1989 and 1994. On 307 occasions, the Department of the Environment overturned decisions even where local authorities felt that applications did not warrant planning permissions.

The results were taken from a total of 322 responses from district, metropolitan and county councils, which represented 73 per cent. of the councils that were sent questionnaires. The effect of Government planning guidance and Department of the Environment policy meant that a retailer's application for an out-of-town development had a 62.7 per cent. chance of being passed. The general feeling among town planners is that, although PPG 6 and PPG 13 are tighter than previous guidance, they are clearly not strong enough.

A report by Essex county council states:

"the government's test of vitality and viability of existing town centres is ill defined and the move to out of town developments . . . has inevitably reduced the choice and range of shopping in town centres".

A metropolitan district council reported:

"The town centre needs to regain its role as the focus of community activity in shopping, employment, cultural, educational, housing, leisure, and commercial terms".

The Labour party is firmly against out-of-town developments. They undermine our local businesses and the credibility of our high streets. There are too many empty shops, factories and residential developments in city areas. Labour Members and I applaud councils such as Leeds, which have adopted 24-hour cities, and firms such as Asda, which are prepared to develop the concept of 24-hour shopping in city centres. One of the great issues of our age is that the public supports the high street, but increasingly shops out of town.

In preparation for this debate, I went shopping in Sainsbury's in Leicester on Sunday. I have to report that I really enjoyed the experience. I was impressed by the way in which retail developers have made shopping into a family event. My family is very young—my son is only 11 days old—so it is not as active as the family of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South, but I too hope to visit Cirencester and Tewkesbury one day. Innovative schemes have been developed—for example, Sainsbury's new proposal, in association with Cox and Kings, a well-respected travel agency, to establish travel agencies inside its supermarkets. Those are new, consumer-friendly ideas. Consumers—the shoppers—welcome those developments.

I urge the private sector and big developers to develop those excellent ideas in the town centre context. One does not have to create great monstrosities outside town centres. One can develop centres in the context of urban life.

If our aim is to regenerate our town centres through our retail planning policies, we have to support local authorities by giving them a clear vision and adequate resources which enable them to adopt a clear strategy. A transport policy involving investment in public transport can deal with the inconsistencies of deregulated buses and massive road-building schemes. By giving people a viable alternative to car journeys, reliance on car travel can diminish the associated problems of congestion and air pollution.

The Labour party believes that it is essential to protect our towns and cities so that they can flourish and provide an effective basis for community life.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): The debate has not quite been a love-in but certainly an occasion for considerable agreement or, perhaps, variations on a theme. There was a little bit of Christmas tree utilisation—my hon. Friends the Members for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) and for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) covered the debate with a few coloured lights and attacks on the Treasury, among other things. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) said, there was a huge measure of agreement.

I was, surprisingly, able to agree with some of what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) said. I understand what she said as I have experienced great difficulty in finding clothes, but especially shoes, in the right size. The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) might be interested to know that my youngest son wholly understands the importance of activity shopping, filling his pockets with as much pocket money as he can bludge off his parents and buying fast food. His third word was "McDonald's". Perhaps we should warn the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) to watch his son—his third word might be "Sainsbury".

I was intrigued to hear the reasoning advanced by the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). He blamed the Government but then immediately turned on the then Liberal council and said that it was to blame, too. Of course, the temptation was to agree with him. We have come to expect the type of speech made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). It appears that the Liberal party invented everything from bicycles to viable solutions, even if someone else thought of them first.

Like other hon. Members, I am grateful to have this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Environment Select Committee and congratulate it on its excellent report. I say that not only because it provided strong support for our policy but because, in its spirit of inquiry, it accurately pinpointed matters where the policy needs clarification and where further development is needed.

The Committee, initially under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), then under that of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who launched the report, and subsequently under that of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who initiated this debate, has produced a clear and thorough report. It presented the Department with a considerable challenge. As has been said, we agreed with most of the Committee's recommendations. By responding positively, we have set ourselves a major work programme. As people will recognise, we shall not be able to do it all at once. Some things will be done as a matter of priority; others will follow on a longer time scale.

I recognise the concern for us to move quickly in forming a response to PPG 6 and its variations. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said at Question

[Sir Paul Beresford]

Time today, we intend to have the consultation draft issued by the summer. In the meantime, PPG 6 as it stands, plus ministerial speeches and the inferences in them, will apply, which is why it is appropriate to try to get through some of the points raised this evening as quickly as I can.

We accept that this is not a one-off opportunity to tune our policy. We must monitor the policy continuously to ensure that it is effective in meeting our objectives, which are to maintain and enhance existing town centres and ensure that everyone has access to a wide variety of shopping. As has been said, the benefits of competition should be accessible to all, not only those who have access to a car.

The Select Committee provided a major opportunity to scrutinise not only Government policy but the most recent developments in this fast-moving industry. It provided us with a lot of useful material and proposals for action, which we very much appreciate. My Department, on behalf of the Government, has now responded to those proposals fully and positively and we are proposing to revise our PPG note on town centres and retail developments, to commission good practice guidance, to promote town centre management, to commission research and to improve the quality of statistics on the retail industry that may be used for retail planning.

In our response, we propose to revise PPG 6. I should make it clear that we are proposing particularly to clarify a number of issues in response to the Committee's comments. We do not propose a dramatic and radical extension of our policy because, after all, the Committee broadly endorses the policy as it is.

The Committee highlighted the need to clarify our approach to the location of retail development. We propose to do that in two ways. First, the PPG will emphasise the need for a plan-led approach. That means that we shall expect local planning authorities to set out clearly in their development plans the strategy for retail development. That will need to be based on a good understanding of existing centres—city, town, district, local centres and even the particular historic preserves, I suppose we could call them, of my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown). We shall also need to reflect on the need and demand for further retail development in those areas. Local plans will need to be clear and unambiguous about where development is expected to take place and which sites are earmarked for retail development.

Secondly, the revised PPG will clarify our approach to the location of retail developments. PPG 6 and subsequent speeches by Ministers describe a "sequential approach". That advised planning authorities and developers to look first for town centre sites. When suitable sites are not available, those concerns should look for edge-of-centre sites. That means that the shoppers coming by car are able to walk into the town centre for shopping and other business and it also enables those coming to the centre by bus or on foot to walk out to the new shops. The PPG suggests that the limits be defined in terms of "reasonable walking distance".

We may need to be more specific. There is a limit to how far people can walk with several heavy bags of shopping and how far car drivers will walk. That has been explained in no uncertain and clear terms by my wife, who utilises the sort of Sainsbury's store enjoyed by the hon. Member for Leicester, East at the weekend.

Mr. Timms: I welcome what the Minister is saying about the changing policy framework, but what advice would he give to a local authority that is having to look again at earlier planning permission? My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said in opening the debate that many planning applications have been given permission, but have not yet been implemented. When the time limit expires, local authorities have to look again at the permission granted, or sometimes the applicant wants to vary the conditions that were imposed first time round. Would he advise local authorities to look at the application afresh in the light of the new policy, or should they feel constrained by the policy when the initial application was made? Indeed, what guidelines will Ministers follow in reconsidering old applications?

Sir Paul Beresford: At this stage, my advice would be that the new conditions would apply if the application fell out of time.

There will be some cases where there could be justification for not locating in the town centre, such as large showrooms or where people want to take goods away that they could not reasonably carry from the centre of the town. In those cases, we shall still expect retail developments to take into account the current tests: the impact on the vitality and viability of existing centres, accessibility by a choice of means of transport and the impact of overall car use.

Put simply, we shall still expect local planning authorities and developers to look for locations that will also be easily accessible to those without a car. Our advice is to look at the town centre first and then at the edge-of-centre sites, before considering looking out of the centre: a sequential approach to look for suitable sites. It should apply equally to food shopping and comparison shopping.

To revitalise our town centres, we need to encourage diversification, which hon. Members have touched on. Town centres are not only about shopping. We want to encourage a wide variety of activities in town centres, even if it is the eating of fast food by the son of the hon. Member for Brent, South.

We want to encourage offices, entertainment, culture, higher education, hospitals and, most of all, housing. We must bring our town centres back to life. To do that, we want to promote a greater mixture of uses, not only side by side, but on top of one another. We want to remove some the barriers to achieving that and will be working closely with the financial institutions and developers to that end.

Mr. Vaz: Will the Minister confirm the report in *The Independent* of 20 February that the Department of the Environment is proposing to develop a superstore outside Cambridge?

Sir Paul Beresford: At this stage, we are considering the proposal with considerable care. It might be helpful if the hon. Gentleman would await developments.

One of the main areas on which the Environment Select Committee focused was the perceived inconsistency between two different guidance notes—PPG 6 and

PPG 13. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already indicated that the Government are concerned about how town centre car parking is currently used. Although circumstances may vary from place to place, it may be more a question of making better use of existing parking spaces—through management and pricing policies—than providing a lot more car parking.

The key issue is to make short-term public parking available to town centre users, rather than insisting that generous parking be provided in new developments. That is part of the pressure that drives business out of town. The revised PPG will remove any misunderstanding.

The key to creating vital and viable town centres and meeting the challenge of existing out-of-town developments is to take positive action to improve them. Existing guidance already promotes town centres. Our report, "Vital and Viable Town Centres: Meeting the Challenge", which was published last May, makes the case for assessing the health of a centre, establishing a partnership body and drawing up a strategy and action plan for the centre. It recognises that each centre will need to establish the way ahead for its own future.

To take that initiative further, we agree with the Select Committee that more guidance to all those concerned is needed. We will work closely with the Association of Town Centre Management to produce good practice guidance and to promote training in that field.

Town centre improvements and town centre management will involve extra money. We are actively considering how that will be funded. Much of it will come from targeting existing resources more effectively, such as through the Department of Transport package approach, which encourages local authorities to adopt a genuinely strategic approach to dealing with their transport problems, particularly in urban areas. Likewise, local resources can also be targeted more effectively, such as on street cleaning, lighting and measures to build out crime, which includes closed circuit television.

We recognise, however, that additional funds will be needed. My Department has already targeted town centres through various urban programmes, the latest being city challenge, to which reference was made, and the single regeneration budget. Some 40 schemes within that budget, accounting for 20 per cent. of the funding, are partnerships aimed at town centre revitalisation.

Funding will also need to come from other partners. Up to now, that has been in the form of generous support from a few major retailers, such as Boots and Marks and Spencer. In future, we will need ways of giving everyone an opportunity to contribute and of encouraging them to do so. We are still looking at ways of achieving that.

To help developers and retailers invest in town centres, we need to help them in other ways. In particular, we are looking for ways to assist them in site assembly. The plan-led approach, which I referred to earlier, will both help that and be helped by it. The plan, with the participation of retailers, should identify appropriate sites for further retail development. Once in the plan, that will assist land assembly, especially if there is a need to acquire sites compulsorily.

We need to provide a more favourable climate to encourage private investment in town centres. We will be looking at ways to involve the private sector in town centre revitalisation, both through direct investment in property and through investment in the town centre infrastructure.

A key issue raised by the Select Committee, which my Department recognises, is the need for more research on retail issues to assist the planning system. In particular, there is general agreement on the need for better information about the impact of out-of-centre and out-of-town developments. Research is being commissioned at the moment on the impact of out-of-town shopping, and we are hoping to sponsor research on attitudes to, and preferences for, the various different types of shopping.

The first concern is the impact of out-of-centre superstores, especially on market towns, which rely heavily on a town centre supermarket as the anchor store. The second is the impact, including the cumulative effects, of some of the newer out-of-centre retail formats—retail warehouse parks, warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres and so forth—on existing centres.

If the issue of impact and its relative significance is better understood, the assessment of out-of-centre developments should be made much easier. One of the main concerns, however, is that existing information about retailing is not as good as it could be and we are committed to improving the availability of existing data, including information on floor space and employment. Provided that a way to obtain information on retail turnover can be found, that does not create an undue burden on business, and it will ensure confidentiality and guarantee co-operation by retailers. The Government will consider favourably proposals for securing data on retail turnover. It is hoped that all that data can eventually be available for defined town centres, at regular intervals, which will help towns and cities monitor the health of their centres.

In conclusion, may I again congratulate the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment on his excellent report? I hope he considers that we have responded fully and constructively. As he will no doubt point out, our next task is to deliver. The Select Committee will be calling us to account in a year's time and I hope that we will be able to show considerable progress. On this subject, it would appear that we are all agreed on the correct way forward. We all seem to have the same objective: to make the planning system work in delivering what we all want—vital and viable town centres that are attractive, accessible and desirable to everyone to shop in.

9.55pm

Mr. Bennett: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I thank the Minister for his response and take him up on the point that he made in conclusion?

The tradition established by my predecessor, who is now the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, was that the Select Committee had a duty to return to its reports to find out what progress had been made. The Minister seemed to think that we might let him off for 12 months, but I think that some members of the Committee would probably rather come back to it a little sooner. May I suggest that we might look into it in October?

We are concerned that we get the new planning guidance as quickly as possible, and I think that the Government recognise that. We are also concerned about

[Mr. Bennett]

the planning applications that are in the pipeline but where construction has not taken place. We want to hear quickly how the Government will finance city centre management and it would be wrong for us to wait another 12 months for a progress report. I suspect, therefore, that the Select Committee will want to come back to the matter much sooner. I hope that the Government will have taken action by then.

Question deferred, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No 52 (Consideration of Estimates).

9.57 pm

Sitting suspended.

10 pm

On resuming:

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the deferred Questions which he was directed by paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates) to put at that hour.*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1994-95

Class IV, Vote 1

Question,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £1,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1995 for expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on support for business, research and development; consumer protection and the regulation of trade, energy related programmes, including research and development, and residual privatisation expenses; departmental administration, central and miscellaneous services; security of oil and gas supplies; the operational costs of departmental executive agencies and associated research laboratory privatisation expenses; the provision of land and building; loans, grants and other payments.

put and agreed to.

Class VII, Vote 7

Question,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £1,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1995 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment and its agencies on administration, including research, royal commissioners, committees, etc., and by the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency on appeals, and by the Building Research Establishment Executive Agency on buildings research and surveys.

put and agreed to.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions which he was directed by paragraphs (1) and (2) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates etc.) to put at that hour.*

ESTIMATES, 1995-96 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1996 a number not exceeding 53,500 all ranks be maintained for Naval Service.

ESTIMATES, 1995-96 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1996 a number not exceeding 142,990 all ranks be maintained for Army Service, a number not exceeding 131,000 for the Individual Reserves, and a number not exceeding 63,950 for the Territorial Army.

ESTIMATES, 1995-96 (AIR) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1996 a number not exceeding 73,860 all ranks be maintained for the Air Force Service, a number not exceeding 18,150 for the Royal Air Force Reserve, and a number not exceeding 2,050 for the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 1993-94

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £167,222,897.35 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses of certain grants for Civil Services for the year ended on 31st March 1994, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 180.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1994-95

Resolved,

That a further sum not exceeding £1,171,473,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1995, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 181 and 250.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Jonathan Aitken, Sir George Young, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory and Mr. Anthony Nelson do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (NO. 2) BILL

Sir George Young accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1995 and 1996; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 64.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

MEDICINES (FEES)

That the draft Medicines (Fixing of Fees Relating to Medicinal Products for Human Use) Amendment Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 2nd March, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

DSS Compensation Recovery Unit

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.2 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am grateful for the opportunity to have this debate on the subject of the compensation recovery unit of the Department of Social Security. This little-publicised body is causing misery and anger up and down the land, and it is high time the Government were forced to justify the activities being carried out in its name. This year, the CRU will claw back around £100 million from victims of accident, illness or disease, who may have taken several years to obtain an award from insurers or from the courts.

In this financial year, about 40,000 people will have had to pay benefit back to the CRU, and about 700 people will have had to pay back more than £25,000 each. The biggest single clawback that I have been able to find this year is from a person with a spinal injury, who has had to pay more than £84,000 to the DSS. For someone to have received that amount of benefit during the past few years, he or she must be a paraplegic or almost totally dependent on others. The 10 biggest clawbacks of this year are all for over £65,000 of benefit being paid back to the CRU.

My association with this issue arises from contact with Clydeside Action on Asbestos. Jointly, we lobbied Parliament in November last year, as a result of which a splendid article in the *Daily Mirror* led to large numbers of victims of the DSS contacting me. With subsequent publicity, I have now received more than 140 letters on that subject.

I shall list at random some of those cases. A man from Middlesbrough fell off scaffolding and received a spinal injury. He can never do manual work again, and has been off work for three and a half years. He was offered £25,000, and has had to pay back £21,000 to the CRU, leaving the rest for legal and medical bills.

A 50-year-old woman from Manchester had an accident in 1990 which left her with a permanent disability and in constant pain. He employers have now offered her £2,500, which is all she will be allowed to keep under the rules of the CRU. She says:

"What on earth have I made all those contributions for? This law is obscene. The honest hardworking folk are being kicked in the teeth."

A man from Durham who spent 33 years down the pits had an accident in 1989 which left him permanently disabled. After three years, British Coal offered him £2,500—again, all that he will be allowed to keep. A man from Lancashire had an accident in 1991 and lost his job. The case is still pending, although the insurers admitted liability on the first day. He owes the CRU £25,000.

A Staffordshire man is already losing £30,000 to the CRU. He notes, as I do, the insult of the amounts being offered for industrial injuries. He contrasts his case with that of a major in the Army who was sacked from her job for being pregnant, and was awarded £400,000 in compensation. Another example is a Belfast bus driver who, after 26 years of work, lost his leg in a terrorist bomb explosion. He was offered £10,000 in compensation, which he fears he may lose to the CRU.

What emerges from those 140 cases is a burning sense of anger from people whose lives have been turned upside down. Many of them have lost their jobs and incomes, and have endured pain and inconvenience with which they must live.

The Minister smirks. I do not find those cases at all funny.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): If the hon. Gentleman is saying that some of those people are paraplegics, is he not aware that, under the old system, future payments of attendance and mobility allowance continuing for years in the future would have to be taken into account? If he wants to make a comparison, he should make an accurate one.

Mr. Worthington: I shall come to that matter in a moment.

Who do those people now regard as public enemy number one? It is the Government, who should have been their safeguard. They no longer regard those who caused the illness or accident as their enemy. In all cases, they feel betrayed by the Government.

They thought that they were part of a national insurance scheme into which they had contributed year after year to cover themselves against an eventual calamity. They never thought that the scheme was a fraud, in that the money would have to be repaid. What was the point of their national insurance contributions? Those who were not receiving contributory benefits did not have to pay them back.

I am grateful to the Social Security Select Committee for agreeing to my suggestion that it should investigate the work of the DSS. The Minister appeared before the Committee today, and I was pleased to see that he found it impossible to justify the CRU's work. It was disturbing to see that he had no knowledge of the consequences of its work.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who is in his place, for initiating his Workplace Injury Victims Bill, which draws attention to this issue.

Perhaps the Minister will be able to explain this evening how there is justice when all the money that is received in benefit is clawed back, although for years the victims have been contributing 9 or 10 per cent. of their incomes to national insurance. All the money is clawed back. The pre-1989 scheme, under which half the benefit was clawed back, contained an element of justice, as the victim was at least allowed to keep his or her own contribution.

There is no justice in the present scheme. When a victim receives compensation for illness, disease or accident, that settlement comprises various elements of damages, such as compensation for previous earnings and loss of future earnings and often a large payment for pain and suffering. When the Government claw back benefits, they ignore those elements and take back everything that has been paid by way of benefit to the victims, even if that encroaches upon any sum awarded for pain and suffering.

That is nothing more than theft. The Government have absolutely no entitlement to money which has been awarded to cover pain and suffering. Perhaps the Minister will inform the House how he justifies that indefensible action.

[Mr. Worthington]

I said earlier that I became involved in this issue through my association with Clydeside Action on Asbestos and Clydebank Action on Asbestos. Asbestosis sufferers have had to pay back £1 million to the DSS this year. Can one imagine the horror of the situation when sufferers of that terminal and appalling disease fight for years to gain some compensation for the illness inflicted upon them by negligent employers, and then have to pay back their compensation to the DSS?

Clydeside Action on Asbestos has dealt with cases of people who have paid back up to £50,000. Even if they die before the settlement is made, the DSS is at the graveside to claw back the money from mourning dependants.

Asbestosis sufferers have to suffer a terrible ordeal. First, they must prove that they contracted the disease rather than lung cancer or some other illness. They must then prove where they contracted that disease, perhaps 10, 20, 30 or 40 years before, and they must find workmates who can testify that they worked there. They must then locate their employers, many of whom have gone out of business, or find their responsible successor bodies.

They then face years of litigation. If they win their cases, they may have to pay back to the DSS all the money awarded to them. That is a squalid practice, which reflects very badly on this country, and especially on the Government.

I am particularly angry about the situation because my constituency of Clydebank has an asbestos disease rate about 500 times the national average, due to its background of shipbuilding and engineering and the presence of a major asbestos factory. An article in *The Glasgow Herald* in 1993 about Turner and Newall's asbestos factory is accompanied by a photograph of young factory workers from 1953. All those workers are now dead, and 12 of them died from breathing-related diseases.

The matter is about much more than asbestosis, although I believe that asbestosis sufferers suffer particularly badly because of the time involved in settling their claims. Often, people are desperately ill, and a large part of their settlement is awarded for pain and suffering.

Other injustices are also emerging. What will happen if the insurance companies or the courts make a particularly niggardly settlement? What is the point of appealing that decision when any extra settlement will simply be confiscated by the agents of the Government?

There is increasing evidence—which is known to me and to the trade unions, if not to the Minister—that the clawback is backfiring, as more and more insurance companies are now offering only £2,500, which is the maximum amount that cannot be clawed back. Britain's largest union, Unison, has seen the number of cases which settle at £2,500 increase from 40 in 1990 to 270 in 1993, although the total number of cases has not increased. That is a more than sixfold increase. The Transport and General Workers Union and the GMB report the same findings.

How interesting it is that the victims are so angry with the Government that they would rather those who cause their affliction got off lightly than that the Government recovered more money. It is the reverse of what the Government intended. They said that the principle was that the negligent and the culpable should not be subsidised by the taxpayer, but that is what is happening.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will my hon. Friend comment on my suggestion that the ultimate solution should be for the compensator—either the employer or his insurance company—to have to repay to the state the social security benefits instead of the person who is ill or injured? That would load the dice slightly in favour of workers who are suffering from the exploitation of employers or insurance companies that deliberately stall and offer insulting sums in compensation.

Mr. Worthington: That is a worthwhile idea to explore. The present position is certainly intolerable, as the person who is suffering from the system is the one who has already suffered.

In evidence to the Social Security Select Committee, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers described the effect of the CRU as iniquitous, and so it is.

This afternoon, I listened to the Minister's response to questions from the Social Security Select Committee. It was a depressing and disturbing experience. The Minister seemed to have no knowledge of or concern for the consequences of his policies upon people who had suffered a calamity in their lives. All that mattered to his Department and the Government was efficiently gathering in £100 million per year.

The fact that the system was treating quite brutally victims of industrial accidents, disease and other misfortunes seemed not to bother him at all, and he was quite unable to answer questions about the consequences of his policies upon those people. Bad employers are now benefiting from his policies, because of the increased practice of only £2,500 being offered. That seems to have passed him by, and the Department does not even bother to keep statistics.

He seemed to justify it all by saying that the taxpayer now benefited by £100 million a year. The victims are taxpayers. They paid their national insurance and all their other taxes for years, and they have the right to be considered. Are they being treated fairly? I am a taxpayer, and I do not want tax savings at the expense of those who are injured, maimed or ill.

This afternoon, the Minister seemed unaware that he is no longer supposed to be a smart lawyer. He is supposed to be a Minister of the Crown, and deal with the world of values. I would like him now to defend the values that are causing distress to thousands of people throughout the country through the CRU.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): I shall ignore the discourtesy in the last part of the hon. Gentleman's speech.

He was right to say that asbestosis cases are some of the hardest for anybody to litigate. The circumstances are usually tragic, the problems of proof many years afterwards and the difficulties of medical evidence all too apparent, but they are the most difficult and hard cases, analogous to the problems of pneumoconiosis and the dangers of radiation damage and other forms of cancer.

There are fundamentally difficult problems of proof that give the plaintiff considerable disadvantages. *[Interruption.]* I shall finish the sentence. Until the Limitation Acts were relaxed a decade or so ago, they were classically the cases which would never get to court, as the injury did not manifest itself until well after the limitation period.

Mr. Worthington: I am grateful to the Minister. I assure him that it is not simply an issue of asbestosis. I can show him other cases which are equally tragic, but I know about asbestosis. He mentioned pneumoconiosis. Is he aware that there is a separate scheme for pneumoconiosis sufferers, so that they are not caught up in this scheme? Will he introduce a similar proposal to lift those with asbestosis out of this tragic situation?

Mr. Evans: That is widening the argument considerably. The point at stake is this: we are discussing the assessment of damages for common law actions. If the hon. Gentleman wants to argue that asbestosis cases should be treated in some different fashion, that is a separate issue. If he does so, he has to bear in mind that they are not necessarily the only hard and difficult cases.

I accept that the operation of the scheme has been seriously misunderstood, and it is painfully obvious that it has been seriously misunderstood by the hon. Gentleman. The fundamental principle—a very old one—is that there should not be double recovery by the plaintiff: in other words, the plaintiff cannot have his cake and eat it. *[Interruption.]* It is not just the Government who claw back what they pay out. In an ordinary indemnity policy, when the insurers have paid up, they take the advantage of the plaintiff's rights and extract what they can from the defendants.

There is nothing unusual about that principle; indeed, it was embodied in the Beveridge report. A compromise was made in the Law Reform (Personal Injuries) Act 1948, whereby 50 per cent. of certain benefits was deducted under a statutory exception for five years. That compromise, however, was plainly a confusion. The courts added to the difficulty: some benefits were subsequently held to be non-deductible in full, while some were held to be deductible in half.

The most startling conclusion in the line of cases occurred in Hodgson *v.* Trapp, decided just before the legislation that we are discussing. More than £30,000 in respect of attendance and mobility allowances, cast forward without limitation in terms of numbers of years, was deducted from the plaintiff. The injustice, however, was even worse than that. Under the old scheme, what was deducted went for the benefit of the tortfeasor—the negligent employer; the person who was partly to blame.

It is hardly surprising that the original arrangements under the 1948 Act underwent considerable criticism in a report by the National Audit Commission and another by the Public Accounts Committee—a Committee of the House. The Government were persuaded to act on the basis that the existing system was not working in a coherent fashion, and aspects of it were plainly unjust—particularly to the severely disabled.

Under the old scheme, in the hard cases to which the hon. Gentleman referred—cases in which someone might be rendered paraplegic, for instance—enormous sums of attendance and mobility allowance would be deducted in full from that person's damages. Something obviously had to be done, and that is why the Government legislated as they did.

Mr. Mackinlay: Out of the frying pan into the fire.

Mr. Evans: That is not the case.

Under the scheme for which we have now legislated, those who receive benefits and recoup moneys must repay the benefit. That is hardly an unjust proposition, and it is hardly startling in an international context. Many other countries in every part of the world have a variety of different mechanisms to protect state welfare payments, and to provide for certain arrangements for the recovery of those payments from those who are guilty—

Mr. Mackinlay: Let us set aside for a moment the question of how compensation should be comprised and assessed. Does the Minister not understand that employers and insurance companies are exploiting the position, because they know that it gives them maximum leverage to make a poor, sick individual settle early and settle for little?

Mr. Evans: No; that is a gross exaggeration. If the hon. Gentleman has evidence to that effect, he should give it to the Select Committee. We shall await its report and see what evidence there is. The Association of British Insurers did not accept that the £2,500 lower limit—which is a practical arrangement—was being abused in the fashion suggested by the hon. Members for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and for Clydebank and Milngavie.

The arrangements under the legislation are, in broad terms, acceptable and fair to all the parties involved.

Mr. Worthington: No.

Mr. Evans: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman may not be persuaded by my argument yet, but let me at least complete this facet of it.

In so far as the plaintiff has received state benefits just as though he had paid out for a private insurance policy on an indemnity basis, if he recovers he has an obligation to repay. If he does not recover, he does not have to repay, but he still receives his state benefits immediately and in full, like anyone else.

The defendants have to pay out money. They have to recoup it under the administrative arrangements of this scheme, whereby insurers pay it direct to the CRU—so the insurer has to pay. The taxpayer is now being paid out a not insignificant sum of money, whereas that sum of money—this shows the injustice of the 1948 scheme—was being used previously to subsidise the negligent and those who were partly to blame for accidents. That cannot be a sensible or reasonable targeting of public expenditure on social security priorities.

Of course, members of the public who are suing prefer to win the maximum damages that a court will award or which the insurers to the defendants might pay up. But traditionally, damages for tort injuries are based on compensation—no more and no less. I think that someone said that the awards for compensation may not be high enough, but that is a rather different issue. The principle is: a person will be compensated for his injuries, no more and no less, under a scheme which is well established and long known.

[Mr. Evans]

The problem with the arrangement under the old scheme was that it was unfair to the taxpayer and it dissipated public money in a way that was inconsistent. It was not fair as between different classes of plaintiffs, particularly the severely disabled who had on-going obligations to deduct in respect of attendance and mobility allowance.

Mr. Worthington: The Minister is doing the same as he did this afternoon—telling us what was wrong with the old scheme. I am asking him to justify the new scheme. It was clear this afternoon that the Department does not keep statistics or information. I have more information about the working of the scheme and its consequences for people than the Minister does. Why will he not turn his attention to the workings of the new scheme and its consequences for people?

Mr. Evans: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall come to the workings of the new scheme. He undoubtedly has a certain amount of information about its operation. He has tabled large numbers of parliamentary questions about it. The Department of Social Security is well aware of how the scheme operates.

It is not helpful to the House or to anyone to cite, as the hon. Gentleman did, the bald facts of a number of cases, some of which would undoubtedly be thought tragic. But the arrangement must be that the plaintiff in an ordinary action at common law has a case which may be strong, indifferent or weak. That is reflected in the amount that he succeeds in recovering. Understandably, those who may wish to obtain more do not always do so.

The Government had a choice about the way in which the new scheme would operate. How were they to make provision for the repayment of the moneys? As the hon. Member for Thurrock has suggested, it was open to the Government to say that all recouped damages should be added as an extra head of damages. That sounds an extremely attractive proposal to plaintiffs—

Mr. Mackinlay: And fair.

Mr. Evans: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but there is then an element of double recovery.

It is hardly surprising that such a proposition would be entertained by the insurance industry as an appalling increase in its costs, and a burden by way of additional expenditure on insurance premiums for the rest of the public who are not injured—

Mr. Mackinlay: But it would help health and safety standards in factories.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman makes the perfectly fair point—even if it is perhaps not in order—that there is a strong public interest in improving safety standards at work, on the roads or anywhere else. The old system, which enabled the negligent employer to take advantage of the taxpayer, is hardly consistent with that argument.

The Government, in introducing the new scheme, had a number of options. We could have created the kind of statutory repayment right—a statutory right of subrogation—that exists in certain other parts of the world, whereby we would nationalise all plaintiffs' claims, take conduct of them and settle them on behalf of the plaintiff, on the basis that so much of the damages could be identified as loss of earnings against which benefit could be offset. The other option that I heard about this afternoon was to agree the proportion of contributory negligence.

The Government, rightly, chose not to do either, because it would have involved considerable administrative expense and meddling in the affairs of plaintiffs who have, and ought to have, free conduct of their litigation. The Government's choice is administratively extremely simple. By placing a requirement on insurers to pay the compensation recovery unit a certified amount to the Government, we have introduced a scheme that, for the first time, gives the taxpayers' interest proper representation.

It would be possible to introduce a case-for-case breakdown to deal with the issues of whether there should be separate heads of damages and contributory negligence. However, only a fraction of personal injury cases lead to litigation, and an even smaller fraction—less than 10 per cent.—are determined by a judge.

The trade unions or lawyers representing both sides in such arguments deploy an exact practitioner's art, and such claims are cheaply and economically settled, with the avoidance of litigation. If we were to introduce a system whereby the Government were to act as big brother and to interfere in that settlement process, we would inevitably create considerable expenditure and place the Department of Social Security in the position of judge, without the expertise and a full and fair trial.

It is simpler and fairer on all parties involved for the Government to recover the whole of their loss. That is not startling or unfair, but is the basis on which insurance companies operate in respect of, for example, ordinary indemnity insurance. You may pay your premiums, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the insurance company always expects to recover its loss from you.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 16 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 23 March.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL (*By Order*)
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 23 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Peace Process

1. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process in Northern Ireland.

2. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current progress of the peace process.

10. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about recent progress in the peace negotiations.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Representatives of the Government continue exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein and the loyalist parties. We have made clear the need for constructive discussion on the decommissioning of arms and for the parties to join in an exploration of the ways by which this can be most effectively achieved.

Mr. Soley: Given the considerable achievement by everyone, including the Government, of keeping the peace process moving, can we make sure that we do not get bogged down on the arms issue, which could be part of the normal negotiating procedure? I think that the Secretary of State will find considerable support in all parts of the House if he proceeds in that way although he might not find support for it when he picks up a British or American newspaper.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said at the outset, but it is important for substantial progress to be made on the issue of decommissioning arms before parties can enter discussions with the Government on political matters. I agree very much with what was said yesterday in Congress by Mr. Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary with responsibility for European and Canadian affairs, who said that decommissioning should begin now and should not wait until the end of negotiations.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Does the Secretary of State recognise that, for the progress of the peace process to continue, it will be necessary to maintain the confidence of the nationalist community? Does he not recognise that the Royal Ulster Constabulary is seen by many in that community as a sectarian force, and does he not think that some offer of reform and restructuring might assist in ending the log jam in the present negotiations and discussions?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: First, I wish to pay a tribute to the RUC, whose steadfastness has done a great deal to lead to the ceasefires some seven and a half and six months ago respectively. Secondly, the RUC is well aware of the need to acquire, retain and enhance confidence right through the community, including the nationalist community. In that it is having considerable success now that it does not have to spend time in anti-terrorist operations to the extent that it used to. Thirdly, questions of restructuring the RUC are way beyond the mark. The RUC and the police authority together are sensibly engaged on examining the way in which the transition to more peaceful circumstances may be managed.

Mr. Hain: May I wish the Secretary of State a happy St. Patrick's day tomorrow? Opposition Members are united in supporting his determination to progress the peace talks. I wish that that were true of all his hon. Friends. I urge him to resist the determination of those weary old warhorses who have signed early-day motion 803 to keep Sinn Fein from the negotiating table. They seem obsessed with that. It is vital to get Sinn Fein, along with all other parties to the dispute, around the negotiating table as soon as possible so as to maintain the momentum.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman began very well with his question, for which I thank him, but it deteriorated fairly soon afterwards. I do not recognise his description of any of my hon. Friends. All hon. Members, my hon. Friends included, wish to see the process of talks towards an overall political settlement resume and succeed. The hon. Gentleman said that Sinn Fein should be part. If it can show itself to be like any constitutional party and no longer inextricably linked with or connected to a paramilitary organisation, that will become possible as far as the Government are concerned. But if peace has come for good, why can it not give the assurances for which we have asked and which I have communicated to all hon. Members in a letter which I wrote this week?

Sir James Kilfedder: Is it not sickening that the head of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, should describe himself as a "man of peace", unless of course he is referring to the fact that his terrorist organisation has been responsible for sending countless men, women and children to the peace of the grave? Despite the ballyhoo in Washington, may I urge all constitutional politicians in Northern Ireland in the meantime to engage in meaningful dialogue either on the framework document, or on any other document that may be produced for those talks?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My hon. Friend has drawn attention to words that, along with many others from that quarter, a large number of people throughout the United

Kingdom and more widely find hard to take. On the second part of his question, I warmly agree that it is of the highest importance for constitutional parties to engage in discussion of those issues, which must inherently be interwoven in any final accommodation or settlement. I hope that that will come about. I believe that it will.

Rev. William McCrea: Bearing in mind the long list of Government concessions already given and pocketed by the IRA terrorists, will the Secretary of State inform the House of any further concessions outstanding or intended to be granted in the foreseeable future? Does not he understand the frustration and anger in the community at such rewards being given to unrepentant IRA murderers, and the insult that that causes to law-abiding citizens in the community?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Since I do not recognise that any concessions—let alone rewards—have been made to the IRA, it follows that I cannot give notice of any further ones. There will not be. Peace-loving constitutional people in Northern Ireland and more widely have deep hostility to those who claim that they are committed to peace and democratic methods, and who cannot and refuse to give the assurances that the Government have asked for: that they are prepared to deal seriously and constructively with the question of getting rid of the arsenal of arms they have, which is appropriate only to an army, and not appropriate to people who are concerned with peace.

Mr. Temple-Morris: Can my right hon. and learned hon. Friend confirm, as he made clear in his recent Washington statement, that, in the policy and principle of progressive disarmament, we have the best hope of delivering all parties into substantive talks, and that only those talks in that circumstance can deliver peace?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am very glad to reiterate to my hon. Friend what I have said time and again, as has the Prime Minister—that constitutional parties and politicians cannot be expected to sit down and discuss the future structures of Northern Ireland with people who, by implication, reserve for themselves the right to go back to the use of arms, which they have used with such devastating and evil effect over so many years.

Mr. Maginnis: Since Martin McGuinness, who leads the Sinn Fein delegation to the exploratory talks, and Gerry Adams, who now rubs shoulders with President Clinton, were both flown to the Whitelaw Cheyne walk talks in 1972, has the Secretary of State any intelligence that he can share with us as to when those two individuals cut their links with the IRA and became democrats? We would all be interested to know that. Since the Prime Minister suggested on 16 January that the IRA and Sinn Fein were two separate organisations, and the Secretary of State told us on 7 March that they were still inextricably linked, did the Prime Minister ignore intelligence that was available to him at the time, or does the Secretary of State have new intelligence that he can share with us? We would appreciate some elucidation on that issue.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Over many a long month and year my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, myself and the hon. Gentleman have acknowledged and asserted that Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA are inextricably linked, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, they are separate organisations, linked inextricably as they are. The hon. Gentleman knows very well the capacity in which Mr. McGuinness and Mr. Adams came to London when they met the noble Lord Whitelaw, and he is perfectly entitled to make that point. However, what I have to do and what I have to urge others to do is to look forward and encourage those who now claim to be politicians who are committed to peaceful ways of resolving political disputes and issues. We must encourage them to demonstrate that, because only they know their true intentions. We have to go by objective outward and visible signs, and it is those for which we are calling.

Mr. Mallon: Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be unwise to overlook the fact that the vast majority of the nationalist community have been involved in a peace process over the past 25 years, and that during that peace process over those long, difficult and dangerous years, that large section of the nationalist community kept alive their faith in the political process?

Does the Secretary of State further agree that, when we reach a stage, as we should very soon, where, in effect, the political process supersedes the peace process, we can start to do what we all set out to do—to create a solution to a very serious problem? Does the Secretary of State agree that the longer a peace process is seen to operate in isolation from a political process, the more difficult it will be to solve the problems that we have to solve?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I readily give the hon. Gentleman the assurance for which he asked at the beginning of his question—that the overwhelming majority of the nationalist community were wholly committed to peaceful ways of dealing with political matters and condemned with disgust the violence that was perpetrated in the name of their cause. That is absolutely true. That is expressed in the enormous majority of nationalists in a recent poll—over 90 per cent.—who called upon the IRA to surrender their arms.

We all want to see—we believe that it is the only effective means of achieving stability in Northern Ireland—a process by which constitutional politicians sit down and discuss the issues and reach agreements about them. That is the way forward and I believe, therefore, that it is much more propitious for that that peace should be established. That is the way in which they are linked as the hon. Gentleman said.

Ms Mowlam: I am sure that the Secretary of State is aware that the Opposition want progress to be made on the decommissioning of arms, but we do not want that issue to become a stumbling block in the peace process because the talks are crucial to keeping the momentum going. In that light, will he clarify to the House some of the statements that he made in answer to earlier questions? He has asked for "visible signs" and for "clear and constructive assurances". Can the Secretary of State be more specific about what he was referring to? At one point he referred to decommissioning beginning now. It might be helpful if he could clarify whether that is a precursor to dialogue between Ministers and Sinn Fein.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I was saying that it is only the IRA and Sinn Fein who know what their true intentions are. The rest of us listen to their words, but we have to make up our own minds as rational human beings by reference to what they say, what they do and, more aptly, by what they do not do. That is what I meant. I drew

attention to what was said by Mr. Holbrooke on the Hill yesterday to show how important it was that decommissioning should commence.

I made clear in the letter that I sent to all hon. Members the other day what was necessary for exploratory talks. I said:

"Before Ministers will participate there must first be a clear and reliable assurance from Sinn Fein that constructive discussion—particularly in achieving substantial progress on decommissioning arms—would be facilitated and accelerated by Ministers joining the dialogue."

In other words, there is no magic formula which is the one and only one which can possibly be espoused. Another way of putting it would be to say that they have got to assure us of serious and substantive talks designed to lead to concrete steps on the decommissioning of arms and explosives. You know it when you see it; let us not get tied down to a legalistic approach to something that is very simple and easily understood.

Private Lee Clegg

3. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made in discussing the release on licence of Private Lee Clegg.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Private Clegg was informed last week that his case will be referred to the life sentence review board for consideration at its meeting on 6 June.

Mr. Sutcliffe: The case was reviewed on 20 January, so why was it so long—until last Monday—before we found out that it is to be reviewed again in June? The life sentence review board met in February and is to meet again in April, but we are told that Private Clegg will have to wait until June. Is it not the Secretary of State who takes the final decision on the recommendations? When will he be in a position to announce Clegg's release in view of the weight of evidence that proves that Clegg was not responsible for what took place?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's concern and I wrote a letter to him that he should have received yesterday or today. In line with normal procedures, Private Clegg's case has been reviewed with a view to determining when it should be considered by the life sentence review board, the body which advises the Secretary of State on the release of life sentence prisoners. The question of eligibility for release on life licence is, rightly, always considered with great care and in great detail. I am satisfied that 6 June is the appropriate date for consideration of the case by the board.

Mr. Brazier: Further to the previous question, may I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to include in the review of such cases, with which he is assisting my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, the fundamental question whether it is possible in principle for a criminal offence of any sort to occur during a volley of shots, the first of which—indeed, all but one of which—was deemed to be legal, given that under British law one has to have a guilty intent to be guilty of a crime of this kind?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Again, I know of my hon. Friend's close interest in these matters. He will know the terms in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced the review of the law of murder. My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the central feature of the criminal mind, known to lawyers as the mens rea, and I do not doubt that such matters will be under consideration.

Framework Documents

4. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the response in Northern Ireland to the framework documents.

9. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representations and of what general nature he has received following publication of the framework documents; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): "Frameworks for the Future" was published on 22 February. It is too early to make a full assessment of the response in Northern Ireland, and many people and organisations are still studying these complex documents before responding. So far the Northern Ireland Office has received 147 letters of varied content from members of the public and from Members of Parliament.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reaction from the parties in Northern Ireland suggests that the nationalists feel that their views are well represented in the framework document? Has not the time therefore come to provide some cheer and comfort to the Unionists? To that end, will he continue to place great emphasis on the need to decommission IRA arms and assure the House that he will consider fully and favourably the proposals contained in the Unionist parties' own documents?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He raises a number of issues. On his final point, we have made it clear that we shall consider and discuss any documents put on the table for discussion about the future of Northern Ireland which address the issues. It is important to recognise that there are a number of interlocking issues across a number of different relationships that we have discussed many times in the House which must be addressed if we are to find a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland. Any suggestions that address those issues—wherever they come from—which are capable of securing agreement are matters that we would certainly wish to discuss with the parties. I give that assurance again.

As for the decommissioning of arms, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has this afternoon already clarified the Government's position. I merely add that it is a matter of fact that if we are talking about sitting round a table to come to an agreement on a settlement for Northern Ireland and the parties round it are asked to join parties such as Sinn Fein, they will not do so unless they are satisfied that there has been a sufficient decommissioning of arms by the paramilitaries for all parties to be present on the same basis.

Mr. Greenway: What time scale does my hon. Friend have in mind for talks on the framework documents? Is he aware of the intense interest of the people of this country in the resolution of the problem,

and especially in a fair and proper decommissioning of arms, without which they see any negotiations as completely unfair and improper?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I cannot add to what I have already said about the decommissioning of arms. The Government have no set deadlines or timetable. The purpose of the framework documents, in which there has been enormous interest within Northern Ireland, was to assist and promote discussion and negotiation involving the parties. About 120,000 copies have so far been issued within Northern Ireland. There is much discussion and debate taking place on what is within the documents and on others' ideas about the issues. The debate is constructive and healthy. We hope that it will lead in a reasonably short time to the parties coming together and looking for a constructive way forward.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister accept that, after the initial euphoric response from specially briefed industrialists and the media, the general reaction has been one of dismay and disappointment, despite Government-inspired media hype that elderly politicians were out of touch with the electorate? Will he recognise now that many young people are saying that it is the "You've been framed" document?

Mr. Ancram: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. I find that many people, and especially the young, are saying that it is time for political representatives to talk about the issues. The purpose of the framework documents was to assist in that process.

I have read with great interest some of the reactions of other parties within Northern Ireland. I have discovered such levels of misunderstanding of what is within the framework documents in some of the responses that I would welcome a chance to get alongside the hon. Gentleman, for example, to go through the documents line by line to explain to him the Government's intention.

Mr. Murphy: The Minister will confirm that the framework documents make much of European links. Does he agree that an essential part of the process of peace and reconciliation will be the financial help that will come from the European Union? Will he give the House and the people of Northern Ireland an assurance that the European level will be truly additional to and over and above the Northern Ireland budget, and that the Treasury will not use the extra cash to reduce its spending plans for Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ancram: I am not certain whether this arises directly from the framework documents. The documents make it clear that a north-south body would be able to advise the two Governments on matters of common European interest affecting the whole of the island of Ireland. It would possibly manage certain programmes that are already cross-border within Northern Ireland, such as Intereg. Effectively, all representations to Europe would be through the two sovereign Governments. Any moneys forthcoming would be subject to the usual treatment unless the Governments agreed otherwise.

Prison Visits

5. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to how many visits per 28 days Northern Ireland families of prisoners are entitled; for what reason there is a difference between this figure and the entitlement of families in the rest of the United Kingdom; and when he plans to change their entitlement.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): It is our intention to introduce a second paid visit every four weeks in Northern Ireland, in line with the change introduced in Great Britain last year.

Mr. Walker: I thank the Minister for removing that disparity. What are the travel and administration costs of the financially-assisted visits for prisoners in Northern Ireland in relation to Northern Ireland prison rule No. 65?

Sir John Wheeler: I am not able to give the hon. Gentleman the precise figures in the detail that he may seek. I will ensure that he has that information. However, the proposals have a cost to the taxpayer which must be accommodated within the budget of the prison service in Northern Ireland.

Criminal Justice System

6. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for reforming the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: We have put forward a range of measures in recent years to improve the working of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. They include the Criminal Appeal Bill, introduced last month, establishing in Northern Ireland and England and Wales the criminal cases review commission. Other measures are in preparation.

Mr. Mullin: Would it be too much to ask that the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 be applied to all cases in Northern Ireland? In particular, is it not about time, in the light of all the other changes taking place in the Province, that interrogations in police custody were tape-recorded? Did the Minister read the remarks of the judge in the Ballymurphy case the other day which ended after 138 days? The judge said that, had audio recording been available, the case could have been dealt with in six days. Is it not about time that that state of affairs was dealt with?

Sir John Wheeler: I am well aware of the proposals to include video and tape recording of all interviews in police custody in Northern Ireland. Those matters are kept under regular review in the light of the changing security circumstances. I shall continue to be advised by the Chief Constable as to the need to retain the existing arrangements, which I hope may well change in the near future.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there has been much talk about changes in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland? There is a great deal of sympathy for Private Clegg and his family. However, the fundamental difference between us and the men of terror is that we believe in, and live by, the rule of law. Any departure from the rule of law, by anyone, would be a departure from the peace process.

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. He speaks well in favour of the rule of law. The plain truth is that it is the terrorist gangs who depart from the rule of law. It is the terrorist gangs who

want to remove people from Northern Ireland who do not fit with their specifications, and it is the terrorist gangs who hold arms and engage in armed robberies. That is what this House roundly condemns.

Mr. Trimble: I welcome the Minister's reference to the Criminal Appeal Bill. Does he agree that that demonstrates the ease by which legislation for Northern Ireland can proceed upon proper grounds, and will he recommend that to his colleagues on either side of him?

With regard to the future of the criminal justice system, will the Minister give an assurance that there will be no question of a precipitate rundown of the Diplock court system while we still have so many unsolved terrorist cases and so many terrorists who have not yet been made amenable? Will he also support the representations that we have made that there should be consideration, together with the Home Office, about what permanent anti-terrorist legislation the United Kingdom will need?

Sir John Wheeler: The answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is that, of course, I understand why he makes that point. When it is possible and appropriate to include Northern Ireland considerations and issues in legislation originating from England and Wales, that will be done. As for the operation of the Diplock courts, they operate having regard to the circumstances that prevail in Northern Ireland. If it is the case—as it is—that people are still intimidated and could not sit as jurors or give evidence as witnesses other than through the protection of the existing legal measures, those measures must be sustained.

Framework Documents

7. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to consult (a) community groups, (b) churches and (c) other public institutions on the framework documents.

Mr. Ancram: Copies of "Frameworks for the Future" have been made widely available within Northern Ireland. The Government have encouraged all those who read it to consider the proposals it contains and to let us and the political parties know their views.

Mr. McFall: What legislative powers does the Minister envisage will be devolved to a Northern Ireland Assembly? How does he see the relationship between that body and the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman reads the first part of the framework documents he will see the Government's proposals set out, including proposals that legislative powers over matters regarded as transferred, or as essentially transferable, in 1973, be given to an assembly. Obviously the relationship between that assembly and local authorities will be a matter for discussion when the framework documents are being considered, but it would also be a matter for consideration by the assembly itself, once it was set up.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend consult the European Foundation as to the merits of allowing a north-south body to be the interlocutory mechanism for dialogue with the European Union on the disbursement of funds relating to the northern part of Ireland? Will he consider the precedent that such a devolved body could pose for other parts of the kingdom in their relations with Brussels were devolution to extend ultimately to Scotland?

Mr. Ancram: I am interested in my hon. Friend's question and will certainly wish to consider some of the nuances of it, but I am can tell him now that as regards its European representations, any assembly set up within Northern Ireland would have to operate, as does any other part of the United Kingdom, through the sovereign Government of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Molyneaux: The Minister was kind enough to tell us earlier of the vast volume of copies of the framework documents circulated throughout Northern Ireland. Would that be approximately on a par with the circulars that we receive from the Inland Revenue, and would the response be roughly equivalent? Will the Minister press on with the consultations and talks with other parties, as we have done, for the simple reason that, apart from the initial response of what one might call the hired hacks, those who have carefully read the document have concluded that it is divisive and fatally flawed? At the end of all those consultations, will he consider producing another consultative paper—an outline paper on which there could be widespread agreement?

Mr. Ancram: I listened with interest to the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, and I have not yet come across a case of citizens going out voluntarily to collect the forms that he mentioned, or ringing to ask for those forms to be sent to them, as has happened with the framework documents. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman welcomes, as I do, the fact that within Northern Ireland, which is a mature democracy, there has been great interest in the documents so that people can inform themselves about what is being proposed and can play a part in advising their political representatives on the line that they might take in negotiations.

As for the talks, I repeat that the important thing is that the issues identified within the framework documents as those that have to be dealt with be discussed. We do not claim a monopoly of wisdom either in the British Government or in the Dublin Government. We simply say that in the documents we have identified the issues and have suggested ways in which they could be resolved. If anybody else comes forward with other ways that could secure the necessary measure of agreement we would welcome that as part of the discussion. I shall certainly be pleased to meet any party at any time to take the discussion forward.

Mr. Beith: To what extent has the Minister ascertained the views of the political representatives of the loyalist paramilitaries on their willingness to take part in discussions on the document and to assist that process by participating in the decommissioning of arms?

Mr. Ancram: I must first say that I have not been in direct communication with the representatives of the loyalist paramilitaries, any more than I have been involved in the exploratory discussions with Sinn Fein. The same criteria would apply in that case as apply to Sinn Fein. It is our understanding from statements that have been made that representatives of the loyalists are keen to enter discussions and that, although they may have reservations about certain parts of the framework documents, they are prepared to enter discussions on the

basis of the documents. Again, I welcome discussion from whatever quarter it comes, so long as the criteria for becoming involved in discussions, in terms of the decommissioning of arms, have been met.

Mr. Dykes: I thank the Minister of State for the many initiatives that he has taken since the documents were published. Does he not agree that, far from being divisive, they are an excellent basis on which to take the discussions forward, through whatever mechanism and whatever medium, and that, closely and on a continuing basis, the English majority are watching to ensure that all Unionist politicians rise to the moderate opportunity presented?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I find it difficult to understand how a document that is based on the consent and agreement of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland can be divisive; after all, if we believe in democracy, the consent of the majority and the agreement of the political parties within that part of the United Kingdom must be at the very foundation and roots of democracy.

Ms Mowlam: We welcome the consultations on the framework document, and wish the Government well. What message has the Minister for the many groups—trade unions, businesses and parts of the voluntary sector—whose members I have consulted in the past couple of weeks? They are frustrated not only by the lack of any clear economic strategy for the use of the money that is available from both the public purse and international funds, but by the lack of accountability and transparency in relation to how the money is currently allocated.

Mr. Ancram: I find the hon. Lady's question very surprising. As she knows, we are consulting various parties about how moneys can be spent. We are trying to encourage inward investment into Northern Ireland, to provide jobs and prosperity for its people. We are keen to ensure that whatever dividend results from the cessation of violence and, I hope, the permanent establishment of peace is shared as widely as possible, and that no part of the Northern Ireland community feels that it has not gained advantage from it.

The most important element in any future prosperity for Northern Ireland, however, must be political development. The question concentrates on that, and I would welcome the views of trade unions, Churches and business organisations, from whichever quarter they may come.

Investment Forum

8. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what positive responses to date have resulted from the Investment Forum held in Belfast last year.

Mr. Ancram: We are pursuing 17 potential inward investment projects as a direct result of the forum. There are other spin-offs: for example, our overseas sales teams have seen a significant surge of interest in Northern Ireland as an investment location.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the Minister for his reply, and congratulate all who have been involved in the Investment Forum. I also send good wishes to those who will be involved in similar activities in the United States later this year.

Does the Minister consider that Northern Ireland Members of Parliament can reasonably expect opportunities to meet those who visit their constituencies with a view to investment? Will he encourage Industrial Development Board officials to involve Northern Ireland Members of Parliament more in future than has been customary in the past, and allow them to engage in consultation with such groups on the clear understanding that consultation is confidential?

Mr. Ancram: I shall certainly pass on what the hon. Gentleman has said to my noble Friend Lady Denton. He rightly said that any such contact would have to be on a confidential basis. As he will realise, there is considerable competition for the projects that I mentioned in my original answer to go elsewhere, and it would not be clever of us to try to conduct such negotiations in public.

Mr. Alexander: Is my hon. Friend aware of the wide interest created in Northern Ireland by the forum, which was held under the auspices of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister himself? Is he further aware—as I am sure he must be—of the enormous export opportunities that it has generated, and will he assure the House that the momentum will be continued, because of its great importance?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has made an important point. The Investment Forum was very much the start of the process, not the end. The Industrial Development Board in Northern Ireland is working hard to carry forward the initiatives that were begun in the forum. It is interesting to note that calls to the IDB in London have doubled since 31 August, when the ceasefire was announced.

Mr. Spellar: Does the Minister accept that, although new investment is welcome, existing businesses must also thrive if the peace dividend is not to be perceived as a peace deficit? In particular, will he assure us that every effort is being made to ensure a steady progress of orders at Harland and Wolff? What is being done to obtain the order for a floating production oil system for that yard?

Mr. Ancram: If I may, I shall pass that last question on to my noble Friend Lady Denton and ask her to provide an answer to the hon. Gentleman. It is absolutely clear to those of us who work within Northern Ireland that peace of itself is not enough to bring the incentives for inward investment and exports of the sort to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Political development is needed to underpin the incentives for investment. That is why we put so much store by the political process. That is the only way in which confidence will be created in a stable future of Northern Ireland which will bring the benefits to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Illegal Weapons

11. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the recovery and destruction of illegal weapons in the Province.

Sir John Wheeler: Since the announcement of the ceasefires, up to 5 March 39 weapons, just fewer than

2,300 rounds of ammunition and almost 600 lb of explosives have been recovered. Substantial progress on decommissioning paramilitary arms is needed to move the political process forward. We continue to pursue decommissioning of illegally held arms during the exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein and loyalist paramilitaries.

Mr. Robathan: I welcome that response from my hon. Friend. Will he reassure the House that the security forces will continue actively to search for illegal weapons? Does he agree that the most positive contribution that could be made by President Clinton and the glittering guest list at last night's Sinn Fein dinner in New York would be for them to press Gerry Adams and to explain to him that there could no further progress towards a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland unless substantial progress was made on handing in illegally held weapons?

Sir John Wheeler: I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the security forces will continue to pursue all illegal acts in Northern Ireland and, in particular, to search out the stocks of weapons and explosives that still exist. On his latter point, I should simply say that Provisional Sinn Fein should act. It is actions that count, not words.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the evidence of Labour councillors personally benefiting from fraud, corruption, nepotism and inefficiency is such that people should be informed about it before they vote in the local government elections?

The Prime Minister: I have no doubt that there are many cases of waste, inefficiency and malpractice in Labour councils; increasingly, one has seen that in auditors' reports. It is right that the auditors should investigate and make those matters public.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister confirm, as a matter of fact, that in a few weeks' time two new tax rises will be introduced—the cutting of mortgage tax relief and of the married couples allowance—which will add about £250 a year to the average family's tax bill?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly confirm the tax changes to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. I will also confirm for him that, as a result of the measures taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we are now well into the most sustained recovery on the most secure basis that this country has seen for many years, with the economy growing at almost 4 per cent., exports at record levels, the current account in surplus, investment rising and unemployment now having fallen by 600,000—a set of economic circumstances that we have not seen for many years. That is largely due to the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend took the right decisions at the right time.

Mr. Blair: Are not those tax rises, on top of the existing ones, one reason why people feel so angry about this Government? Is not the truth that, with taxes up, mortgages up and living standards falling, all that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has done is confirm what the vast majority of the British people already knew: that unless you are one of the favoured few at the top, you are worse off under the Tories.

The Prime Minister: Which taxes would the right hon. Gentleman cut? Which pieces of expenditure has the right hon. Gentleman opposed? How many times has the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) sought extra expenditure of one sort of another? When is he going to understand the most basic economic fact—that he cannot promote expenditure and call for tax reductions and expect to be taken seriously? We have taken the measures necessary for this country's economy. That is why our economy is more effective, more efficient and more competitive than any other economy in western Europe.

Mr. Blair: I will tell him what I understand, that—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Since he asked me the question again, let me tell him what is wrong. What is wrong is to fight the election promising to cut taxes then raise them by 7p in the pound.

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about what is right for this country, why does he not for once acknowledge the changes that there have been in this economy? Why does he not for once acknowledge what once he used to say—that his plans for a minimum wage would cost jobs? Why does he not acknowledge what a large number of business men are now telling him across Europe—that his plans for the social chapter would cost jobs? Why does he not acknowledge that this country now has an economy that Labour could never have achieved if it had followed the advice of the shadow Chancellor, who on every conceivable occasion has guessed wrongly about what should happen with this economy?

Q2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate those parents who have set up an organisation called PASS to defend the right of parents to send their children to grant-maintained schools? Will he arrange for an application form to be sent to the Leader of the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: I fancy that the right hon. Gentleman does not need one, but his hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) who speaks on education from the Labour Front Bench most certainly does, for he would still destroy the chances for parents to send their children to grant-maintained schools,

even though the vast majority of hon. Members in this House, including the right hon. Gentleman, know that that choice should be available to every parent.

Mr. Ashdown: In view of the Prime Minister's comments on waste and inefficiency, how does he justify an increase over the past four years of 36 per cent. in the amount of public money spent on Government entertainment? What would he have to say to a council which was forced to sack teachers and which responded by raising by more than a third the money that it spent on its own entertainment?

The Prime Minister: I think what I would say to any council which was contemplating that sort of action concerning teachers would be: how many administrators in education is it looking at, why are there two administrators for every three teachers in education and why do county councils like the right hon. Gentleman's seek to look at teachers before they look at other areas of savings?

Mr. Faber: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity in the past couple of days to discuss Anglo-Belgian relationships with his counterpart the Prime Minister of Belgium, and in particular what must have been a disappointing visit for him to west London on Tuesday night? At what is undoubtedly a difficult time for British football, would my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Chelsea football club on a stunning victory on Tuesday night, its fans on the good-natured manner in which the game was watched, and the Metropolitan police especially on the firm but sensitive way in which the game was policed?

Madam Speaker: I should just inform the hon. Gentleman before the Prime Minister attempts to answer that question that, nice as it may seem, the Prime Minister has nothing whatsoever to do with the success of Chelsea football club.

The Prime Minister: I am happy to pass credit for the success to the players. May I simply say that I am delighted at how well they did?

Q3. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: Did the Prime Minister read this morning's comment by Lord McAlpine that a spell in opposition would be a good thing for the Tory party, and does he agree that this is one of the rare occasions on which the interests of the Tory party and of the nation coincide?

The Prime Minister: I did see the comments in the *New Statesman and Society*. I understand that Lord McAlpine is promoting his book, which is a work of fiction.

Q4. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Does my right hon. Friend share the pleasure of my constituents in Basildon at the first visit to this country of a President from the Philippines, Fidel Ramos? Will he tell the House whether any trade agreements have been reached as a result of the visit? Finally, will my right hon. Friend do all in his power to assist and encourage the President to try to alleviate the plight of street children and to take forward the social reform programme?

The Prime Minister: Of course, I am delighted to welcome President Ramos to the United Kingdom. He will find a very warm welcome here and would clearly find one in Basildon also, were he able to visit it. I am not sure whether the President is here long enough to do so on this occasion, but when I meet him later on this afternoon I will be happy to pass on the invitation. I understand that it has been a successful trade visit and a number of contracts have been signed with substantial British companies.

I know that President Ramos is achieving a great deal with his social reform programme and I know that the whole House would welcome all that can be done to help street children, both in the Philippines and elsewhere.

Terrorism

Q5. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations Her Majesty's Government have received from Sir Colin Figures and Sir Peter Marychurch concerning knowledge of an impending attack on airlines at Frankfurt airport in December 1988; and what response he has sent.

The Prime Minister: We have received no such representations.

Mr. Dalyell: In that case, could Sir Colin and Sir Peter be invited to shed light on the very specific jictels—Joint Intelligence Committee telegrams—giving clear information about the downing of an aircraft in October, November and December 1988? Could they shed light on the agreement reached by western intelligence with terrorist elements in the middle east about the downing of just one airliner, rather than 10 or 12, in what was described by Mohtashemi as "the rain of blood", and also on what they know of statements by United States agencies about Major Charles McKee not being able to return to the United States alive?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of that detailed question so that I might examine the matter before responding.

As he knows, the Lockerbie investigation is the largest criminal investigation ever undertaken in this country. I have to reiterate to the House that the Lord Advocate has discovered credible evidence against two people only, and they remain the only two accused. If concrete new evidence were brought forward, it would of course be fully investigated. The point raised by the hon. Gentleman, of which he was kind enough to give me prior notice—that western intelligence agencies would enter into a deal with terrorist groups to allow the destruction of an aircraft—is utterly and completely unfounded. It did not happen and the hon. Gentleman can be assured upon that point.

Engagements

Madam Speaker: The next question is from Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: Question 5.

Hon. Members: Question 6.

Mr. Skinner: All right; Question 6.

Q6. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: Has the Prime Minister seen the reports today that if the Tory party loses more than 1,000 seats in the local government elections in May, which it undoubtedly will, senior Tory Members of Parliament are going to kick him out like a dog in the night? Last year, the Prime Minister said that he had got three bastards in the Cabinet: I do not think that he can count.

The Prime Minister: As for counting, I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's Question 5 and Question 6 at the same time.

The substantive part of the hon. Gentleman's question might well have been asked of me last year, the year before last, and the year before that. It almost certainly was, and it will very probably be asked of me next year, the year after and the year after that.

Sir Graham Bright: Has my right hon. Friend seen reports in this morning's newspapers suggesting that he is considering plans to change how state education is funded? Will he confirm to the House that that is not so?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I did see the report to which my hon. Friend refers and I can tell the House categorically that it is absolutely without foundation. I do not know whether it is incompetence or malice, but it is certainly inaccurate.

Q7. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Foulkes: Has the Prime Minister seen today's statement by the rail regulator that decisions on sleepers and Motorail are a matter not for British Rail but for the Government? Will he therefore confirm today that there will be a full and formal consultation before any decisions are taken on those vital services?

The Prime Minister: I assume that the hon. Gentleman refers to the Fort William sleeper. Representations on that can be made during consultation on the ScotRail public service requirement. In the meanwhile, British Rail will retain the assets.

Madam Speaker: As we started late, I can allow one more question.

Q8. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Spring: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the two Conservative-controlled district councils in my constituency—Forest Heath and St. Edmundsbury—plan no increase in council tax this year? Is he aware that the only reason why my constituents will pay more council tax this year is because of Lib-Lab controlled Suffolk county council, despite it having used up some £16 million of reserves so carefully built up by the last Conservative administration?

The Prime Minister: Lib-Lab councils are a very expensive luxury indeed and I am not surprised to hear what my hon. Friend has to say. Last year, Conservative councils cost around £131 less at band C than Labour councils, and this year the difference looks as though it may be even greater—probably as much as £160 less. I hope that the electorate will bear that in mind in May.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House provide information on forthcoming business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 20 MARCH—Second Reading of the Child Support Bill.

TUESDAY 21 MARCH—Debate on a motion to take note of European Community Document No. 5097/95 relating to the common agricultural policy price proposals for 1995-96 and related measures.

WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

Progress on remaining stages of the Jobseekers Bill.

THURSDAY 23 MARCH—Until about 7 o'clock, conclusion of remaining stages of the Jobseekers Bill.

Debate on the civil service on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 24 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 22 March to consider European Community Document No. 11287/93 relating to external frontiers.

[Tuesday 21 March:

Agricultural Price Proposals 1995-96—European Community Document No. 5097/95; relevant European Legislation Committee report HC 70-x (1994-95).

Wednesday 22 March:

European Standing Committee B—European Community Document No. 11287/93, External Frontiers; relevant European Legislation Committee report HC 48-xxix (1993-94).]

In the following week beginning Monday 27 March, I expect on the Monday to take progress on remaining stages of the Disability Discrimination Bill, which would continue to a conclusion on Tuesday 28 March. I am not yet in a position to give details for Wednesday 29 March and Thursday 30 March, but I anticipate taking Government business on the Thursday until about 7 o'clock, with a debate on the motion for the Adjournment thereafter.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. Before moving on to next week's business, may I ask the Leader of the House to join me in congratulating you, Madam Speaker, on an event that is to take place this Saturday in Birmingham—your inauguration as chancellor of the Open university?

On next week's business, can the Leader of the House explain why, given so much pre-publicity by Ministers about National Science Week next week, we are not holding a debate in the House of Commons on science policy?

Secondly, given the two important defeats in the House of Lords suffered by the Government this week on pension rights of divorced women and remarried war widows, will the Leader of the House give us an assurance that the Government will not seek to overturn those two significant steps when the Bill returns to the House for its remaining stages?

Can the Leader of the House tell us whether we are likely in the near future to have a debate on dentistry in the national health service, in view of the 800,000 patients, 3,000 of whom are in my area, who have had national health service dental care withdrawn?

Finally, in view of the comments made—not in a book—by the former Conservative party treasurer, Lord McAlpine, that the Prime Minister has

"stuffed up the Conservative Party"

and that

"Opposition might cleanse the Tories",

an opinion that Lord McAlpine claims is shared by Tory Members of Parliament, can we have a debate on the consequences for Britain of a lame duck Government, probably a stuffed lame duck Government, who have certainly lost their authority in their own party, in the House and in the country?

Mr. Newton: Rather unusually for the hon. Lady, as she usually manages to ask slightly more sensible questions, her last one sounded as if she was practising as a scriptwriter in a rather second-rate television comedy show. *[Interruption.]* I am probably exaggerating the quality of the show.

Perhaps I might take the other questions in the order in which they were asked. First, I need hardly say that I do indeed join the hon. Lady in the congratulations that she extended to you, Madam Speaker. Indeed, I should have thought of that myself, and I am very happy to join in now.

On National Science Week, the hon. Lady will be aware that we recently had a debate about science, although I accept that there is pressure for another, and I shall bear that in mind. Ministers generally, and I hope all Members of Parliament, will be anxious to support the aims of National Science Week, which was very successful last year. I believe that it will be even more successful this year, and I shall seek further opportunities for debate in due course.

On the House of Lords decisions, the hon. Lady will be aware that, as is usual in dealing with decisions in another place, the Government will wish to consider carefully the implications of the decisions that have been made.

On dentists, the hon. Lady might have registered the fact that in England today nearly 21 million adults and more than 6 million children are registered with NHS dentists, and that there has been a net increase in the number of adult patients registered with NHS dentists. Indeed, since June 1992, the figure is equivalent to one extra patient every four minutes.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Will my right hon. Friend, if not next week, as soon as possible afterwards, offer an assurance of a very early debate on the first special report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests, which was published on 7 March

1995? That is a matter of grave concern to the House, and is delaying the important activities of the Select Committee.

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly bear that point in mind, and it might also be appropriate to have further discussions in the usual channels about the way in which to respond to that report.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): If the Leader of the House is not prepared to hold a debate on the NHS in relation to the lack of NHS treatment from NHS dentists, will he carefully consider the proposals that are afoot to consider restructuring out-of-hours consultancy visiting fees for doctors? Is he aware that, if the current proposals were put into effect, they would act as a perverse disincentive to rural GPs to have any night visits for their patients? It is a serious matter, which needs urgent attention in the House.

Mr. Newton: In view of the way in which the hon. Gentleman has put his point, I shall draw his question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Is it not rather insulting to the Select Committee on European Legislation that the Leader of the House has announced that the uniform visa for the European Community will be considered by European Standing Committee B, when that Select Committee specifically said that it should be considered on the Floor of the House?

Can my right hon. Friend further explain what is the point of debating the common agricultural policy on Tuesday, when the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has just issued a table in the other place showing that the average cost per person of the CAP is £4 a week, while the Foreign Secretary told us in a letter the other day that it was £6.50 a week and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury told us just two weeks ago that it was £7 a week? Would it not be better to scrap the CAP debate until we can find out the right figure and instead debate the uniform visa format, consideration of which on the Floor of the House was judged vital by the Select Committee?

Mr. Newton: I thought that the misunderstanding about the common visa—it is not the principal point of the document to which I referred—which my hon. Friend raised last week, had been cleared up. I noted that he had generously tabled an early-day motion thanking my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for placing a scrutiny reserve on the discussion that took place in Brussels last week. It is a matter of interest, but I think that a debate in the Standing Committee of the kind that I have confirmed today is the appropriate way forward.

As for the CAP and in the light of what my hon. Friend has said, it seems entirely sensible to have a debate on it, which might help to clarify any confusion that exists in my hon. Friend's mind or that of anyone else on that matter. There is no confusion about what is in common between my hon. Friend and the entire Government: the desire to make the CAP more efficient and effective and to continue the process of reform.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): May we have a debate soon on the need to decentralise power throughout the United Kingdom, especially in view of the report in today's edition of *The Herald* on Government-funded research? That report found that in England there is a clear majority in favour of regional elected assemblies; that there is an even bigger majority in Wales in favour of a Welsh Assembly; and that the overwhelming majority of Scots are in favour of a Scottish Parliament. Why are the Government stubbornly refusing to respond to the wishes of the people on that matter?

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman believes that there is a majority in every part of the country in favour of regional assemblies, he needs to do some more research. Whatever that research might show, we all know that the only reason for the Labour party's proposal for regional assemblies is that it is the only way in which it can make sense of its proposal for devolution in various places. Moreover, the net result of such assemblies would not be an increase in local democracy, as is often claimed; rather those bodies would suck up power from existing local responsibility.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate soon on the levels of council tax in north-west Kent? Conservative-controlled Dartford borough council has brought down the council tax, but Liberal-Labour-controlled Kent county council has increased it. That means that all my constituents will have to pay more council tax because of the financial irresponsibility of the Lib-Lab-controlled Kent county council.

Mr. Newton: I should certainly wish to consider the possibility of providing further opportunities for debate on local government and related matters for a variety of reasons, including the fact that I suspect that similar points could be made about Labour and Liberal-controlled areas in many other parts of the country.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 721?

[*That this House welcomes the fact that the Foreign Affairs Committee is carrying out an investigation into nuclear proliferation; and calls upon the Government to hold a debate on the subject before the Non-Proliferation Treaty Conference takes place in mid-April.*]

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the conference on the renewal of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is vital? Does he also accept that concern has been expressed about how Government policy in recent years on Trident and THORP has fitted in with that treaty? We should have the opportunity to debate nuclear non-proliferation before the conference begins in April.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will perhaps understand if I can make no immediate promise of a debate on that matter. The Government are co-operating with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which is holding an investigation into some of the matters raised. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the Committee earlier this year, we firmly believe that indefinite and unconditional extension of the non-proliferation treaty would be in the best security interests of all.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend offer a debate on conservation of fish

[Mr. John Butcher]

stocks in the world's oceans? There is some urgency on that because we know that the Spanish fleets have devastated the fishing grounds of Namibia, have finished off the stocks off the coast of west Africa and are now moving into the waters off Newfoundland. We have no true guarantees of what they may do in the Irish sea. Wherever they go, they perpetrate an ecological disaster and leave desolation behind them. Should not the House come to a view on the changes that are required in international law to address that problem?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware of the exchanges with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food earlier this week and of the efforts that are being made by the Government to contribute to sensible negotiation to find a sensible solution to the dispute between Canada and the European Union. It is clear that that solution must be based on regard for conservation and must be effectively enforced.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Would not it be a good idea to have a debate on what is happening to the Motorail and sleeper services in the north of Scotland? As I interpret the Prime Minister's response to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) a few minutes ago, he seemed to give an assurance that those services would still be running while formal consultations were taking place.

That is exactly the assurance that the Secretary of State for Scotland refused to give at the most recent Scottish questions, despite the fact that a Scottish Office Minister had previously given that assurance to the Scottish Grand Committee. Does not the Leader of the House appreciate that the uncertainty in itself is deeply damaging, particularly to the tourist industry in Scotland? May we have a debate and a decision, and may we have that assurance repeated now?

Mr. Newton: I am obviously not in a position to add greatly to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said. I think he had it in mind that, while decisions at the moment are matters for the commercial judgment of British Rail, steps will be taken to ensure that the equipment and infrastructure—for example, the rolling stock—are maintained in place.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on job creation in Derbyshire, especially in the light of yesterday's excellent news that unemployment in the county has dropped by 4,000 over the past year, which is a drop of more than 9 per cent.? Such a debate is important in the light of today's even better news that Toyota is to build a second factory in the county, which will employ another 1,000 people.

Mr. Newton: Again, I shall bear that request for a debate in mind because it has many attractions. I am quite sure that every hon. Member will welcome the further decision by Toyota. It is reaffirmation of the company's confidence in the economy of this country and, dare I say it, it is further confirmation that Britain, for reasons not unconnected with the social chapter that Labour wants to impose upon us, is far and away the most attractive place for people to come to do business.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): As the Government are pushing forward the Disability Discrimination Bill on 27 and 28 March, should not the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill at least have an opportunity to make some progress in Committee so that the House may have an opportunity to decide between the principles contained in those two measures? I hope that the Minister does not find my question too unsophisticated, which is what he said last week.

Mr. Newton: I certainly do not wish as a weekly routine to suggest that the hon. Gentleman is unsophisticated, if only because it would be untrue. As I said last week, I have no plans to change the normal arrangements for dealing with private Members' Bills. However, I have plans for making sure that the important Government Disability Discrimination Bill makes progress.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): May we have an early Government statement on the state of Anglo-American relations, particularly following President Clinton's decision to allow Sinn Fein to raise funds in the United States? Does my right hon. Friend agree that most people in this country found the sight of Bianca Jagger and other celebrities hobnobbing with Gerry Adams at a fund-raising dinner in the United States yesterday, which took place precisely because of that decision, absolutely disgusting?

Does he also agree that people in America who want to know more about what is going on in Northern Ireland would do well to listen to the group from Families Against Intimidation and Terror, which has gone to Washington to protest against Mr. Adams? They should listen particularly to Thomas Clarke, whose son Malachy hanged himself in December after being beaten up by a Sinn Fein-IRA terror gang.

Mr. Newton: Plainly, many hon. Members, including myself, well understand why my hon. Friend makes those points. I hope that he, in turn, will understand that I commented on the matter during Prime Minister's questions on Tuesday, and that I would not wish to add to those remarks.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Leader of the House give credit to the BBC for showing the film last night on euthanasia in Holland? That programme was done in a sensitive manner. I know that he might not have seen it himself, but did it not raise many serious issues that are at least worthy of a debate? Will he arrange for that?

Mr. Newton: Not having seen the film, I am not in a position to comment directly. As it happens, however, I saw a discussion of the film later at night on the BBC. That discussion was responsible and balanced, and it clearly showed some of the difficulties in the proposals that are sometimes urged upon us.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on early-day motion 763?

[*That this House notes the honourable Member for Leicester West, as Chairman of the Employment Select Committee, is interviewing leading industrialists and*

businessmen on their remuneration packages whilst at the same time offering these people his services on how to improve their public speaking and presentational skills; further notes that other services offered by the honourable Member for Leicester West include advice on making people redundant and serving on the Remuneration Committee of Ladbroke plc which awarded the Chairman of that company a salary of £583,000 per annum—£108,000 per annum more than the Chairman of British Gas plc—and in addition awarded five directors of the company 1.3 million share options worth £2.3 million; believes that these activities represent a conflict of interest with his current position as Chairman of the Employment Select Committee; and calls on him to resign immediately.]

Thus the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment would have an opportunity to defend himself properly.

Mr. Newton: The Employment Select Committee has just made a number of recommendations on a matter that may not be directly related to the issue that leads to my hon. Friend's question, but that could be appropriate for a debate. Short of that, I cannot give my hon. Friend the undertaking that he seeks, but I have read reports in newspapers that the Committee may give further consideration to the matter.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Will the Leader of the House make time for an urgent debate on the future of the railway rolling stock industry in view of the announcement made at 3 o'clock this afternoon in Berlin that Asea Brown Boveri Ltd., one of Britain's two main rail manufacturers, is to merge with the German company Daimler-Benz? Is he aware that the financial markets suggest that, in the long term, that may bring work into British factories because of lower labour costs and high productivity in this country, but that, in the short term, an order from Britain for more Networker trains for London commuters is vital to keep the York works open? Unless such an order is made in the next few weeks, the York works will close, and the enormous multi-million-pound opportunities for exporting the railway body shells that are built in York to Germany and other parts of Europe will be lost for ever.

Mr. Newton: There are two points there. On the latter one, of course I recognise the urgency of ABB's position. We have been over this ground before, so the hon. Gentleman will know that it is a matter for British Rail, but I understand that it intends to issue tenders within the next couple of weeks. I am not so sure that the thrust of the first part of his question will be as welcome among Labour Members as it is among Conservative Members, but I agree with it.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend ask the Home Secretary to make a statement in the House next week on the Official Secrets Act? Is he aware that, in the 1989 discussions, it was acknowledged that all former members of the secret intelligence service should not write books based on their experiences? Since that occasion, two officers—Brian Crozier and Desmond Bristow—have done so, and next week a BBC journalist is publishing a book that includes direct quotations from no fewer than 27 officers, without any reference to the Ministry of Defence D-notice committee. Does not that drive a coach and horses through the Act, as many of us at that time predicted would happen? Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement by the Home Secretary next week?

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to arrange a statement, but I can undertake to bring my hon. Friend's concerns to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I draw the Leader of the House's attention to early-day motion 735 on the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill?

[*That this House notes the overwhelming support for the abolition of cruelty to wild mammals shown by honourable Members on 3rd March when the Second Reading of the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill was agreed to by 253 votes to 0 and calls on the Government to ensure that Parliamentary time is given to ensure the Bill passes all its stages; further notes that supporters of cruelty to wild mammals were too embarrassed to show their lack of support and abstained; and believes that the unanimous vote for the Second Reading of the Bill should be reflected in the composition of the Standing Committee.*]

That Bill received its Second Reading on 3 March by 253 votes to zero. Will the Leader of the House tell us when the Bill will go into Committee and will he take this opportunity, or arrange for an early opportunity, to explain what is going on? When Bills leave the Chamber after being given an overwhelming Second Reading, we expect them to turn up in Committee so that hon. Members can continue the consideration. What is going on?

Mr. Newton: It is not for me to determine the proceedings of the Standing Committee that considers private Members' Bills. It has been working away on a number of Bills in the order in which they were given a Second Reading by the House. That is entirely reasonable and sensible.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): As one of the longest-serving members of the council of the Open university, may I associate myself with the warm remarks about your installation on Saturday as our chancellor, Madam Speaker?

Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House arrange a debate next week on the disgraceful pressure from Ealing council to spend planning gain money from the Tesco development of the Hoover site miles away from Perivale in Southall? That matter should be brought before the House. The people of Perivale are more than annoyed—they will not have it.

Mr. Newton: It occurs to me almost weekly that were my hon. Friend to apply for an Adjournment debate on Ealing and were successful, he would have enough material to occupy an hour and a half on his own.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Did the Leader of the House hear the long, courteous and considered response that the Prime Minister gave to my careful question at Question Time? In the circumstances, could we have a statement from the Law Officers, particularly the Crown

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Office in Scotland, producing what the Prime Minister called "concrete" evidence that these Libyans had anything to do with the Lockerbie bombing?

The Prime Minister challenges us to produce concrete evidence. That is very difficult, and we do not think that the Crown Office is in any better position. Is it not time that those Law Officers made a statement in some sort of democratic forum about the basis of their evidence?

Mr. Newton: As always, because of the seriousness with which the hon. Gentleman puts his question, I shall reflect on what he has just asked. As far as I am aware, he did not give me notice of the follow-up to the question that he asked the Prime Minister, so I shall not attempt to answer him off the cuff.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Could we not have a debate on dentistry? The nation's teeth have never been in better condition. It is not a pleasant subject to discuss, there is no need for it and it is ridiculous of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) to suggest taking up the time of the House with it.

Mr. Newton: I was left mildly puzzled by the time my hon. Friend had finished his question. I thought that he began by asking for a debate and then demolished the suggestion halfway through.

Mr. Jessel: I said, could we not have a debate?

Mr. Newton: Oh. At any rate, whatever my hon. Friend intended, I agreed with the general thrust of what he was saying.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): The Leader of the House will be well aware of reports in the newspapers about £5 million payouts for fat cats who are being made redundant from the Treasury. Will he find time to debate that matter? I am sure that many people in my constituency of Nuneaton who are on short-term and part-time contracts find that sum of money extremely offensive.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. Friends will note the hon. Gentleman's point. The terms are those approved by Parliament in 1987 and, more recently, under the civil service compensation scheme, which was laid before Parliament last December.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider his decision to discuss in European Standing Committee B on Wednesday the crucial issue of the control of the European Union's external frontiers? Will he do so not only in view of the arguments put by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) relating to the recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure, but because it is a matter of widespread public concern? It aroused the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who wrote to my right hon. Friend yesterday alongside seven authentic Conservative colleagues, including myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East.

Will my right hon. Friend also give due recognition to the fact that at the European Council meeting, the Home Secretary himself put a scrutiny reserve on that aspect of policy? Does he accept that, at the very least, the public deserve a debate on the Floor of the House? The matter should not be brushed under the parliamentary carpet by a quiet sitting upstairs in Committee.

Mr. Newton: The very fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary last week put a scrutiny reserve on the issue in the way of which my hon. Friend is aware is a sign that the Government are in no way dismissing the importance of the matter. It was based on a misunderstanding, and the document that is being discussed goes considerably wider than the narrow point that the scrutiny reserve touched on last week. I do not think that, even with the best will in the world, I can add to what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Leader of the House assure us that when the special Committee that he chairs reaches a decision on the allegations that two hon. Members took money for questions, it will be debated and determined by the whole House? To help that along, will he arrange for a debate on early-day motion 3?

[*That this House believes that the amounts of money received from all interests, at present required to be registered in the Register of Members' Interests, should be declared.*]

The early-day motion seeks to ensure that the Register of Members' Interests lists not only the firms and trade unions in which hon. Members have an interest, but the sums received.

Mr. Newton: I think that the House, and certainly you, Madam Speaker, would regard it as inappropriate for me to discuss at the Dispatch Box the affairs of the Privileges Committee, of which I have the honour to be Chairman, or what might follow its report, so I will not. On the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, it would be inappropriate for there to be a debate on the matter at this time, especially in advance of any recommendations that the Nolan committee might make.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May I support a call for a debate on the idea of English regional government? Many of us would welcome the opportunity to express the opposition of people in the English regions to the idea of being saddled with an expensive extra layer of government simply because a few Scottish Members want to saddle the people of Scotland with a talking shop in Edinburgh. It would give me an opportunity to express the views of the people of Kent who would not like their affairs to be run by a bloated bureaucracy in faraway Reading. More important, would it not give the Opposition the opportunity to tell us which services would be run by the English regions and which would be ripped from local government?

Mr. Newton: My first step might be to put my hon. Friend in touch with the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who questioned me earlier, put them together in a room and watch the fun.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Has the Leader of the House seen reports of the remarks made this morning by Mr. Charles Gallagher, the president of the House Builders Federation, expressing his regret at what he sees as the Government's abandonment of home ownership as one of their key values? He referred not only to the tax changes that were mentioned some minutes ago

by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) but to the remarks made recently by the Secretary of State for National Heritage and the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, which apparently distanced the Government from their goal of increased home ownership. May we have a debate next week on home ownership so that we can establish what the Government's aspirations are and assess whether, as Mr. Gallagher suggests, home owners and aspiring home owners would be better off under Labour policies?

Mr. Newton: On the hon. Gentleman's final point, if people believe that, they will believe anything. As for the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I was not hitherto aware of the remarks to which he refers, but it is clear from what he said that they are based on a profound misunderstanding.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As, on "News at Ten" last night, a director of Railtrack with responsibility for safety virtually confirmed that automatic train protection will not be installed across the entire rail network, which breaks a firm commitment that the Government have given the House and the country for the past six years; and as the departing British Rail chairman, Sir Bob Reid, has predicted that franchisees will become bankrupt if the rail privatisation plans go ahead—indeed, he claimed that he personally would prefer to put his money into a butcher's shop—can we have an urgent debate on the grounds of safety, especially in view of the confusion reigning over what the Government's transport policy with regard to the railways is and, indeed, whether they have one?

Mr. Newton: On the first point, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is still considering the advice received from the Health and Safety Commission and from Railtrack, and will make an announcement in due course. Secondly, while many attempted interpretations have been placed on the interview with Sir Bob Reid, he made his support for privatisation very clear.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on early-day motion 774?

[*That this House expresses its disquiet at the continued domination of prominent Tories and Freemasons in appointments to top jobs in the National Health Service in Wales as witnessed by the appointment of Derek Morgan, President of the Bridgend Constituency Conservative Association to be Chairman of the largest NHS Trust in Wales, and of David Crosby, prominent Tory and Freemason to be Chairman of the Cardiff Community Healthcare Trust; recalls the ringing declarations of the Secretary of State for Wales and his junior Health Minister that these posts were being advertised and would be appointed on merit only; but notes that these two appointments are examples yet again of the same old names and the same old games; and consider that the breaking up of the NHS into several dozen businesses in this way has enormous attractions to this government in diverting tax payers money into the pocket of prominent Tory supporters to give sustenance to the party after its contemptuous rejection at the ballot box in the Islwyn by-election.*]

The motion deals with the appointment of Mr. David Crosby as chairman of the Cardiff Community Healthcare trust, when he is a prominent Conservative and a prominent freemason. Will the Leader of the House make available information on how many other freemasons have been appointed to quangos both in Wales and elsewhere? There is growing evidence that they are infecting the national health service especially. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that packing quangos with Conservatives is bad enough, but packing them with freemasons is positively sinister?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I shall seek to respond to the sort of question that the hon. Gentleman has asked in the way in which he asked it, beyond saying that it seems to me that the right course is to appoint people with the appropriate qualifications to do the job that is required.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): Given reports today that Sir Robin Butler has found that the Secretary of State for Health breached Government rules on propriety because civil servants seemed to want to dash out and publish the right hon. Lady's speeches in Government-funded magazines, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the politicisation of the civil service, including the use of taxpayers' money for Tory propaganda?

Mr. Newton: I understand that Sir Robin said that he was satisfied that the purpose of the article was to communicate to NHS staff a policy statement relevant to their work, but he thought that the form of the article laid it open to the interpretation that it was publicising a party political event. I am sure that that was not intended. In any event, the Department of Health has assured Sir Robin that it will exercise rigorous scrutiny of such publications in future, and that is plainly right.

Points of Order

4.7 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On Tuesday, I took up with you the issue that had been raised by the apparent purloining of papers belonging to a Member, which were subsequently quoted by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) in the debate on the Gas Bill. I say "apparent" because I am in no position to make an objective determination of the facts, which is why I raise the matter with you. The same point of order was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw). You were good enough to say that you would examine the facts and make a statement in due time in response to the points of order raised with you. I was wondering whether you might now be in a position to do so.

Madam Speaker: I did have inquiries made. I understand that departmental documents relating to the debate on the Gas Bill were found by the tape machine in the Library Corridor. They were not stolen.

I deprecate the fact that the papers were not returned to the Department right away. Instead, Members speaking in the debate on the Bill used sections of the material in an attempt either to embarrass the Minister or to tease him. It is up to the hon. Member to determine the reasons for that. I am sure that he will agree with me that the lesson to be learned is that Ministers should ensure that they or their officials are not so careless in future as to leave confidential documents lying around.

Mr. Davies: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No. I have given a ruling.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have given you and the Minister concerned notice of it.

During my Adjournment debate on 22 February—the subject was the Forth rail bridge—the Minister misinformed the House due to wrong information about an inspection and a report subsequently prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on structural and engineering matters. It appears now that there was no such report and I have received a letter to that effect from the Minister. The findings were based on a 1992-93 report by British Rail before the new painting regime took place. That is an important facet of the argument. My hon. Friends the Members for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) were accused of scaremongering in respect of the state of the bridge. Madam Speaker, will you investigate the matter and seek an apology from the Minister on our behalf?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman did not give me notice of the detail of his point of order. He merely let me know that he was going to raise a point of order on the matter. The matter is difficult, but I believe that it is not a point of order for me. There is obviously a difference of opinion and I advise the hon. Gentleman that he must pursue it with the Minister concerned. I am sure that he has ample ways of attempting to do that and that he will do so.

BILL PRESENTED

MEDICAL (PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE)

Mrs. Secretary Bottomley, supported by Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Tony Newton, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Lang, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Redwood, Mr. Gerald Malone and Mr. Tom Sackville, presented a Bill to amend the Medical Act 1983 to make provision relating to the professional performance of registered medical practitioners and the voluntary removal of names from the register of medical practitioners; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 83.]

Orders of the Day

Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Commonwealth Development Corporation—CDC—is a statutory corporation which was established in 1948 to assist overseas countries in the development of their economies by investing in financially viable and developmentally sound business enterprises. The corporation provides loans, equity and management services in a wide range of economic sectors, operating on a quasi-commercial basis outside Government channels. It enables us to provide direct assistance to the private sectors in developing countries.

Although now called the Commonwealth Development Corporation, the CDC was established by this Parliament. The members of the corporation are appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and it is funded by the United Kingdom Government.

At present, the CDC operates in 52 countries, 39 of which are members of the Commonwealth. A Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the CDC in 1992 concluded that it provided a particularly valuable form of assistance to economies in developing countries.

Last year, the CDC invested around £240 million, a record level. Eighty per cent. of approvals were in the poorest countries, above the target agreed with Ministers. Its total investment portfolio stands at over £1.6 billion.

The corporation's task is to use the disciplines and practices of the private sector in order to promote sustainable development in countries. It invests only when projects are expected to make a positive contribution to national development; participates only when its involvement adds value; and structures its investments according to commercial criteria. The corporation actively seeks to improve the links with British and other private sector overseas investors, so that it can build on its traditional role as a catalyst for mobilising international finance alongside its own investment.

The new focus in developing countries on private sector-led development is opening up new opportunities for the CDC, both in new and traditional areas. It might be helpful if I briefly give some examples of the range and scope of the corporation's activities.

In Zambia, in October last year the CDC took a majority shareholding in Chilanga Cement Limited, the largest cement producer in Zambia and an essential component of the Zambian economy. The corporation has management responsibility for a major programme of rehabilitating and enhancing the productive capacity of that company. Notably, 30 per cent. of the company's shares are to be sold to local private investors, marking an important stage in the Zambian privatisation programme and the return of an active capital market in Lusaka. It is ironic to note that the CDC first become a majority shareholder in Chilanga in 1949, and has now returned to this position after a long period in which the company has been run by a Zambian state-owned company.

In Uganda, the Development Finance Company of Uganda—DFCU—has the CDC as a leading shareholder. The demand for asset finance in Uganda is high. Many businesses are growing rapidly and require quick access to finance for new plant and equipment. The corporation and DFCU have promoted the Uganda Leasing Company which opened for business in January. The corporation will provide 21 per cent. of the equity and a loan to the new company. The managing director has been seconded from the CDC.

Because of Uganda's history, there is a low level of savings, and many would-be entrepreneurs are frustrated by being unable to raise finance for their projects. The Development Finance Company of Uganda has now set up its own venture capital fund. It has enabled mortgage business for house construction and house purchase to expand, and with it the prospect of respectable profits and regular dividends.

The DFCU has nine investments in parastatal companies made in the 1960s, and has thus been well placed to play an important role in Uganda's privatisation programme. The DFCU was centrally involved in the privatisation of East Africa Distilleries, in which it had a 23 per cent. stake. In 1992, the DFCU and the other minority shareholders persuaded the Ugandan Government to sell its 51 per cent. stake to International Distillers and Vintners, which has taken over the management and turned the company round in a matter of two years.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I ask the Minister a question? I am not trying to be especially mischievous; I genuinely want to know the answer. He will know that my hon. Friends were deeply opposed to privatisation of the CDC, but why did the Government decide not to privatise it in the end? What were the pressures on the Government not to privatise, and what interests did they have in mind when they made that decision?

Mr. Baldry: We considered that it would be far better for the CDC to remain in the public sector. We considered all the options, and that was the conclusion to which we came.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why?

Mr. Baldry: Because we believed that that was in the best interests of the CDC and those whom it seeks to serve.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is just a general response. In principle, we do not believe that the CDC should be privatised, but there must be reasons why the Government have come to the same conclusion. There must have been some argument in the Department, and the case put against privatisation must have been

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

overwhelmingly convincing to Ministers. Can the hon. Gentleman tell us something of what the debate in the Department was about?

Mr. Baldry: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is being mischievous after all, or whether he is teasing. Unlike the Labour party, which has a dogmatic opposition to the word "privatisation", we are not driven by dogma. The CDC serves a valuable purpose, and it was obviously right that there came a time when we considered whether it should not remain in the public sector. However, having regard to the particular work that the CDC does, we concluded that it would be better for it to remain in the public sector.

Also in Uganda, the CDC and the International Finance Corporation, with other companies, are developing Uganda's first cellular telephone network, covering 15,000 subscribers in Entebbe, Kampala, Jinja and Tororo. Using the most advanced digital cellular technology, the company will provide high-quality digital telecommunications services, including mobile communication and interconnection to the Uganda Post and Telecommunications Corporation fixed-line network and international gateway.

In India, the CDC has made available a £25 million loan to the Housing Development Finance Corporation Ltd. The HDFC was the first housing finance corporation of its kind in India and has been a leader in developing that sector, with currently 387,000 borrowers and 210,000 depositors. Seventy-five per cent. of its business is with individual home buyers and, with the CDC's financial backing, the HDFC is continuing to expand its business as opportunities grow with the liberalisation of the Indian economy.

In Sri Lanka, the CDC has approved a second loan of US$30 million to the National Development bank to finance the expansion of its existing operations in term lending, leasing and other financing for predominantly private sector industrial clients in Sri Lanka. Overall demand for term finance has been growing at an average of 30 per cent., and is expected to continue in that way.

The CDC's first investment in South Africa is scheduled to be made through the establishment of a fund to make equity and quasi-equity investments in franchise operations mainly owned or operated by previously disadvantaged groups. Nedbank investment bank will be contracted to provide management and technical services to the fund management company, and the CDC's involvement will be purely equity of nearly £2 million.

Throughout the world, the CDC is investing and helping developing countries to promote their economies.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The list of projects that the Minister has given is very creditable, and will be welcomed by all hon. Members.

As the Minister knows, the Prime Minister recently returned from a visit to the middle east, where I understand that he visited both Gaza and the west bank. As far as the Minister is aware, is there any reason in principle why the CDC should not support projects in those areas? If there is no such reason, is he aware of any such proposals?

Mr. Baldry: In principle, there is no objection to the CDC's operating in any part of the world. In practice, when it wishes to operate in a new country, it asks the permission of Ministers. As far as I know, it has made no application or proposal in relation to Gaza or the west bank; if it did so, any such application or proposal would be considered on its merits.

The CDC has recently been granted permission to operate in a number of countries. There is nothing ideological about our attitude: we want to ensure that the CDC is put to the best possible use wherever it operates.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Is my hon. Friend satisfied that, when the CDC makes an equity investment in some enterprise in the developing world, it is every bit as rigorous and aggressive in insisting that that enterprise is run on commercial lines, that opportunities for efficiency gains are taken and that waste and overmanning are eliminated—and in resisting local political pressures to adopt a non-commercial course—as a genuine private sector investor would be when shareholders' money was at stake?

Mr. Baldry: Yes. As the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs discovered when it examined the CDC's work, it has an impressive record of ensuring that its money is put to the best possible use, and that the companies and equities in which it invests use that money in the best possible way. I know of no CDC scheme that has been the subject of public criticism, either in the country concerned or in this country.

In the past, the CDC's resources have been found almost entirely through concessional loans from the British Government. The returns made on the proceeds of its investments have been available for further investment. In 1993, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development announced that the CDC would no longer receive net new loans from Government, but would no longer be required to pay interest on new and existing loans. As a result of the repayment of outstanding interest and capital on loans and other realisations, an increasing amount of new investment is being made, at decreasing cost to the aid programme.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): My hon. Friend has been describing a British success story—the story of an organisation which, as I think he will agree, has successfully transformed itself from a colonial supporting organisation to an organisation that is worldwide, or at least which operates in many interesting and important parts of the world.

Will my hon. Friend clear up two points? First, is he confident that the loans straitjacket will be sufficiently loose for the CDC to be able to borrow effectively and support its work without cost to the British taxpayer? Secondly, how can we more effectively promote the CDC's image internationally? This success story—this British-grown international finance corporation—is very little known outside its client base.

Mr. Baldry: The answer to the first question is yes. As for the second, in the countries that I visit—

Pakistan, the Dominican Republic and other countries where the CDC operates—its work is widely recognised and appreciated. People realise that it is an instrument with which the British Government are helping to develop and sustain private enterprise in those countries. It has a high standing, which is also to the credit of the United Kingdom.

Although the interest rate was lowered to nominal levels in 1994, a full interest waiver for the CDC requires an amendment to the existing Act, which is proposed in the Bill. The Bill also recognises the CDC's continuing need for external borrowing. Last December, the CDC obtained funds from a source other than the British Government—in this instance, the European investment bank.

It is also exploring the possibility of borrowing from other lenders. Its total level of borrowings is already very close to the existing statutory limit of £850 million, and an increase in that ceiling is essential to ensure the corporation's future financial health.

Counted within the limit is the borrowing of CDC's overseas subsidiaries, which will increase roughly in line with the overall increase in its portfolio. The Bill proposes an increase initially to £1,100 million, and then, following the further agreement of Parliament through an affirmative resolution, to an overall ceiling of £1,500 million. That should be sufficient to provide a firm basis for the CDC's future investment programmes well into the next century.

It is a reflection of the CDC's success that the overwhelming majority of new investments will be financed from the returns on existing investments. In 1993, equity realisations of £27 million were made, allowing an overall level of £48 million to be transferred to reserves. It remains the intention of the CDC to unlock the very substantial level of assets held in some long-standing investments so as to secure resources for further expansion of its work in developing countries.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): There is no real controversy about the Bill. Any controversy is about whether it goes far enough. If this is a British success story, why is such a marginal increase being made in the resources which are available? I am confident that those resources will be inadequate in the pretty near future. Why are not the Government backing the success story more fully?

Mr. Baldry: With respect, only a member of the Labour party could describe an increase in borrowing limits from £850 million to £1,500 as marginal. It is a substantial increase in the CDC's borrowing powers. Certainly, the CDC is confident that the increase will enable it to operate well into the next century.

The CDC opened a new office in South Africa last year. This year, it plans to open offices in Mozambique and Uganda. The CDC has helped to establish a venture capital fund in Tanzania, which it also manages. It provides risk capital for local businesses, and complements efforts to establish a local equity market.

In South Africa, even with its far more highly developed capital market, development capital funds for small entrepreneurs can still be very difficult to obtain. Following the visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last September, the CDC is announcing this month an investment of £9 million in a new development capital fund in Johannesburg.

Clause 1 of the Bill increases the statutory limits on the total amount outstanding in respect of sums borrowed or guaranteed by the corporation from £850 million to £1,100 million, with provision for an increase by order for a sum not exceeding £1,500 million.

Clause 2 provides the powers necessary to ensure that the terms of existing aid loans for the CDC should become interest free.

Clause 3 enables the Secretary of State to determine the remuneration of members of the corporation. The Bill makes no change to the Secretary of State's powers to appoint members of the corporation.

Clause 4 gives effect to the repeals set out in the schedule, and clause 5 makes provision for the title and extent of the Bill.

The House last reviewed and agreed new borrowing limits for the CDC well over a decade ago in 1982. Hon. Members on both sides of the House agreed then on the value of the CDC's work for developing countries and for Britain.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister give way before he concludes?

Mr. Baldry: I am sure that the House will again agree to endorse the work of the CDC, to place it on a sound financial footing to carry it into the 21st century and to enable it to continue its excellent work in promoting the private sector's investment and jobs in developing countries. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.27 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I welcome the opportunity to express general support for the work of the Commonwealth Development Corporation and to congratulate the Minister on the c[illegible]ise way in which he went through the clauses. I am afraid that he went through them so quickly that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) was unable to intervene. I hope that my hon. Friend will have the opportunity to speak later in the debate.

Not a great deal divides us on the Bill, but I should like to raise one or two important points. As the Minister said, from its inception under a Labour Government to the present day, the CDC has provided much-needed investment in the poorest countries of the world. In 1993, 72.9 per cent. of total investment went to the poorest countries, of which almost 30 per cent. was allocated to sub-Saharan Africa. Nobody could possibly disagree with that.

Initially, that investment was concentrated in former colonial countries, which subsequently became members of the Commonwealth. Last year, when things had to be changed, as the Minister said, permission had to be sought and was granted for CDC involvement to extend to El Salvador and, indeed, to South Africa—countries, as we would all agree, in need of, earning and deserving the support of this country and of the CDC.

In such countries, where inward investment is essential but private investors are often very hesitant, the CDC carries out its vital work: pump-priming local economies, meeting the needs of some of the poorest

[Miss Joan Lestor]

people of the world for vital infrastructure, contributing to economic and political stability, and sending out positive signals for the rest of the world to follow, which I hope is especially true in the case of South Africa, Mozambique and others.

As the Minister has said and the reports have told us, the CDC is not only effective but has been very efficient in the years that it has operated. In the past, its investment funding has been largely self-generating, supplemented by long-term, low-interest loans. The Minister mentioned the Chilanga cement project in Zambia. I am pleased to tell the House that I shall be visiting that project next week when I visit Zambia. The CDC offered me the opportunity to see the project, and I look forward to it very much indeed.

In the financial year 1994-95, there was a net flow from the CDC to the Government of £7 million and, at the same time, £1,677 million was invested. Final audited figures, I understand, for 1994 are not yet available, but the 1993 figures show that the net cash injection from the Government represented less than 5 per cent. of the level of new investment and 0.5 per cent. of external aid spending.

This Bill is interesting not so much for what it says as for what some of it fails to say. We can all support the move to raise the CDC's borrowing limits, given its good track record and the enduring needs of developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. I am not so sure, however, about the recommendations to remove Treasury controls over salaries, pensions and allowances.

I do not doubt that that will result in substantial gains for some members of the corporation—an outcome synonymous with the privatisation process. Indeed, I am sure that I was not alone in thinking that the CDC was at some point being lined up as a candidate for privatisation, on the grounds that it would give it the commercial freedom that it seemed to be seeking. I therefore welcomed the Foreign Secretary's statement in May ruling out privatisation.

The Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington did not make it terribly clear why privatisation was ruled out. There was a recognition that a privatised CDC would have aims, objectives and a financial structure inconsistent with its development role. From reading the report, that seems why privatisation did not go ahead, and I am very glad that it did not.

In the Minister's winding-up speech, would he tell me why the argument that the CDC could obtain the commercial freedom it sought without privatisation was in contrast to the argument and action over the Crown Agents, which has just been debated in another place, where it was argued that only by the removal of the Crown Agents from the public sector could they have the greater financial freedom that they sought and needed to expand?

I find the argument inconsistent. What was the difference? The Minister, in all fairness, has not explained the reasons. I agree with the Minister and the report that it is inconsistent to deem that privatisation could rule out, hamper or in some way limit the aims and objectives of the CDC. It would be interesting to know why the Crown Agents were treated rather differently.

Speculation about the future role of the CDC continues to grow. This Bill does not answer all my concerns, which were fuelled by recommendations in the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1993, the CDC's own five-yearly review and various odd comments from Ministers. Reference was made in the review to the

"wider world in which the CDC now operates".

During debates in this House in 1992, before her elevation to another place, the Minister for Overseas Development mentioned

"the expanding role which I hope it"—

the CDC—

"will have in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union . . . There is nothing to stop CDC work in eastern Europe provided there is sensible risk".—[*Official Report*, ; Vol. , c. .]

I hope that any possible involvement in that direction will not be at the expense of our commitment to Commonwealth countries. Will the Minister give us that assurance? It is particularly important, given the Government's endorsement in 1993 of the quinquennial review recommendation to drop the operating target for the proportion of investments in the Commonwealth.

I also ask the Minister to assure the House that any such initiative will be funded separately, and that the poor of South Africa, Mozambique or wherever the CDC intends to operate will not be paying for investment programmes in the former Soviet Union. That is a concern that we all share about the aid programme, and the widening operation of the CDC.

In some ways, this Bill is unfinished business, and we will be looking again at the role of the CDC, especially as it expands. There are many areas of investment in which it is prohibited from action—the provision of schools, hospitals and colleges, for example—and although I am aware that it is not, strictly speaking, an aid organisation, the social spin-off of projects should be one of the guiding factors determining their acceptability. Surely that is not too much to ask.

The Government's track record on aid and development is increasingly tarnished, and typified by scandal and mischief, from the misuse of aid funds for the Pergau dam to the wrecking of the Lomé negotiations and the deterioration in the aid budget. While it does not redress the balance, the sound reputation of the CDC makes a different contribution to aid and development projects. I trust that Ministers will bear that in mind during the coming months.

4.36 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I will not take up more than a few moments of the time of the Minister and the House, because there is such broad unanimity on the Bill. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Government and the Commonwealth Development Corporation on this tremendous British success story.

I am particularly interested in the expansion of the CDC from Commonwealth countries into other needy countries worldwide. Of course, it was a lapsus linguae on the part of the Opposition spokesman on aid, the

hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), to mention Mozambique, which I do not believe is a member of the Commonwealth. I appreciate her view that the poorest of the poor should not suffer with expansion in eastern Europe, the countries of the former Soviet Union and Russia.

The CDC has broadened its remit very dramatically indeed, which is to be welcomed because private investment in countries in difficult economic circumstances cannot be bounded by old colonial boundaries, however attractive that may seem historically. I very much hope that the CDC will investigate China and Russia, and I want it to find ways to help some of the poorer countries in the middle east, such as Yemen. The investment in Johannesburg in the wake of the abolition of apartheid is going to be one of the most wonderful developments, and is very exciting indeed.

This Bill will bring some modern structures into the CDC. I welcome the move, for example, to have the chief executive on the board. Like the hon. Member for Eccles, I welcome the fact that we will look more sensibly at salary levels.

I want to consider enlarging the British Government's publicity machine for the CDC. I have been fortunate to visit a number of CDC projects in operation in India and parts of Africa and, as someone who has been to some of the poorer areas of the world, it has been a great joy for me to see an organisation so deftly picking up investment opportunities, staying with a company while it begins to flourish and then withdrawing.

No commercial organisation could ever carry out that sort of operation. After all, the Commonwealth Development Corporation is asked by the Government only to wash its face, not to make a profit, and any profit is ploughed back into the organisation. It is an altruistic attitude, and it is right and proper for a national Government body to achieve that.

I regard the Commonwealth Development Corporation as the silent partner of the Overseas Development Administration's major humanitarian aid effort, and all I ask the Minister is that we should somehow discard that over-humble attitude. We should stop it being the silent partner and try to get its wonderful developmental work known much more widely among the British people.

After all, its work is sponsored through the taxpayer—or is it? Will the Minister assure us that the borrowing levels will not be inhibited by the Treasury? Internationally, the wider borrowing requirements take a burden off the British taxpayer while assisting people in poorer developing countries who need loans, development and, above all, British expertise, which is carried out superbly as only the CDC seems able to do.

I ask the Minister again: will he please think hard about publicity about the CDC? It is a wonderful organisation. It is the United Kingdom's home-grown international finance corporation. All I ask is that we should shout a little louder on its behalf.

4.40 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am glad to see that we are debating this Commonwealth Bill because I thought that this year we would debate a different Commonwealth Bill, which would rule out the Commonwealth Institute. I am pleased to see that the Government have backed off from the Commonwealth Institute Bill, because they would never have got it through this House or the House of Lords. I congratulate the Government on recognising more than they did in the past the value of the Commonwealth.

This could be a golden age for the Commonwealth, now that we have got rid of some of the problems of the past, like apartheid in South Africa and Baroness Thatcher, and moved on so that some good can come out of Commonwealth initiatives. I know that the CDC covers a wider area than just the Commonwealth, but it is good to see Commonwealth initiatives; I was particularly pleased about the current initiative in Sierra Leone.

The CDC is well thought of and extremely successful. The central problem remains, however, of why more is not done to bring it to the attention of the British public and expand it more fully. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) asked a good question, which has not yet been answered. I hope that the Minister will find time later to say why the Foreign and Commonwealth Office seems to be giving the CDC such a modest push. When other small achievements are trumpeted, those of the CDC are not.

May I start by making a couple of quibbles about the CDC? In its annual report, it appears to be a London-based quangocracy of some kind. The board appears to lack balance, and I hope that the Government will take that into account when considering how it is developed. There is an absence of women among senior members of the board. That is a major weakness, given that development in many parts of the world is led by women. Their perspective should be included on the board.

I wonder how the Foreign and Commonwealth Office assembles the board of the CDC. Judging by the annual report, it simply has a whistle down the road to the Overseas Development Institute or Chatham House, and says, "Who have you got here?" or goes around its pals in the banking world. I have nothing against the ODI and Chatham House, as I support both organisations, but the CDC board seems to be stuck in a bit of a rut, as it includes no one from Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales.

Do those parts of the Commonwealth not get a look in when it comes to appointments to the board? Much of the best development is now done by major British non-governmental organisations operating in the same parts of the world as the CDC, but they are not represented on the CDC's board.

I also wonder about the CDC's right-wing tilt. Not only does the text of its annual report have such a tilt but it is the only annual report I have ever seen in which the pictures of board members are tilted to the right as well.

More seriously, the chairman's report on page 8 is worrying, as it says:

"CDC's prospects are aided by the wide-spread acceptance of IMF/World Bank led policy reform".

Where is that widespread acceptance? This is one of the consequences when a country does not send its Prime Minister to the social summit, because he and all those associated with him get out of touch.

[Mr. Tony Worthington]

The summit communiqué, which was agreed at the social summit, says:

"Programmes drawn up by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, designed to restructure the economies of developing countries, should take social factors more into account to avoid disruption".

I hope that the CDC realises that it is not accurate to say that World bank and IMF programmes are widely accepted. Even the World bank and the IMF admit that they have made major errors in their structural adjustment programmes. I hope that that matter will be brought to the CDC's attention.

That apart, we agree that the CDC is well thought of in the House. It has achieved a great deal and is living proof that good-quality industrial and commercial development can be carried out in the most unpromising circumstances. It is extremely good that the CDC should be attempting initiatives in some countries in Africa where it is currently operating—like Sierra Leone and Sudan. I doubt whether it is operating in some of those countries, as nothing industrial or commercial is likely to be going on in Liberia at present, although the annual report says it is.

The Government do not make enough use of the CDC, and the major question that I wish to raise is whether the Bill goes far enough, in terms not only of its borrowing requirements but of commercial freedom. Will the Minister clear up that matter? Is the CDC allowed to borrow commercially if its wants to? If not, why not?

That is basically the problem with the Post Office. The Labour party believes that some organisations in the public sector could be given more freedom. The CDC is trying to achieve the maximum possible economic and social development, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and it would be tragic if such development could not proceed successfully, because the CDC was held up by Treasury rules and Government dogma, which currently prevents the Post Office from being liberated.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will my hon. Friend press the Minister to reply to that point during the course of his contribution? I am not being mischievous again, but it would help the debate if the Minister would deal with the specific point that my hon. Friend put, which is extremely important and repeatedly raised with us by development organisations.

Mr. Worthington: It is the crucial point. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what the CDC says to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Does it believe that it has enough commercial freedom? I am willing for the Minister to intervene.

Does the CDC believe that the Bill before us is the one that will enable it to do its job to the best of its capabilities? I am keeping going to give the Minister every opportunity to answer. Does the CDC have the freedom to enable it to do valuable work in the developing world to the best of its ability, or is it at all hamstrung by Government restrictions? Does the Minister wish to intervene?

Mr. Baldry: I will answer later.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No. It would help our debate. This is a debate.

Mr. Worthington: My other questions are about zones of operation. Where is the CDC allowed to operate? There is a strange part in the annual report about countries in which the CDC is allowed to operate. That is directly under the Minister's control. What agreements have been reached with the CDC about specific zones of operation?

I was unfortunately called out during part of the Minister's speech, and he may have discussed the matter, but we need complete clarity about central and eastern Europe. Will the CDC be allowed to operate in central and eastern Europe, or will it be restricted? Will we be told whether it has been decided that at present the CDC should not be allowed to operate in central and eastern Europe? I do not oppose it operating there, because I believe that the CDC could do a valuable job, but what decision has been taken on that matter?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Ms Lestor) said, we would not want money that would otherwise contribute to economic development in sub-Saharan Africa to go into central and eastern Europe. That is not to say that the CDC does not have a role in that region—I think it does—but I do not think that the Minister mentioned that crucial subject.

Will the Minister also clarify some matters in relation to South Africa? In the most recent annual report accessible to us, we are told that the CDC is not allowed to operate in South Africa. I am sure that that has changed. South Africa has been a Commonwealth country and, since it is the key country in that part of the world—the Minister mentioned it in his speech—the CDC will operate there. On what scale will it operate? I referred, perhaps wrongly, to a marginal increase. It is not a marginal increase, but I do not want the CDC to be hamstrung. To what extent will the CDC be fully encouraged to do the work that it would want to do in South Africa? That is another key question.

Will the Minister specifically say whether the CDC will be allowed to operate in the middle east? The Prime Minister has just returned from Gaza. The greatest need in Gaza and on the west bank is for economic development, so that the people rapidly realise that change is occurring. The skill of the CDC is that it reaches an area before the private sector is fully committed, and Gaza and the west bank are such areas. Once again, I ask the Minister: what is the ruling of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about whether the CDC will be able to operate in that region?

There are several important questions, one of which was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington. The Minister has not answered it. My hon. Friend mentioned structure and commercial freedom, and asked whether the rules that are laid down now are the right ones for the CDC.

I want assurances from the Minister that the CDC and the Government are aware of the widespread questions about World bank and International Monetary

Fund policies that are regarded as having been deeply flawed. I should not like the CDC to be in a time warp in which it would say that they were fully acceptable.

I should like the Minister to answer the geographical questions but, as he will gather, there is general Opposition support for the CDC.

4.54 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): As everyone knows, the Bill will receive a Second Reading, and I hope that it will pass all its remaining stages this evening. The Second Reading debate gives us the opportunity to mention several general matters concerning the CDC, as well as certain matters with which the Bill is not expressly concerned but which are none the less relevant.

As was said at the outset, it is interesting that the CDC has retained its place in the public sector, on the ground, as I understand it, that to be there is more consistent with its development role. That shows, to the satisfaction of some of us in the House, that at least there are some bounds to the Government's doctrinaire approach to privatisation. In many respects, I have always thought that that was a pretty arid argument, because the issue must surely be the effectiveness of an organisation rather than its place in one sector or the other.

It is important to realise that a large contribution to the new investments made by the CDC arises from surpluses and recycled funds. That puts a large premium on good management and sound decision-making. We can have some confidence in that regard. The Minister has referred to the 1992 Monopolies and Mergers Commission report, to point to its conclusion—that the help provided by the CDC is especially valuable to the economies of developing countries.

In another important element, the report recognised the competence and dedication of the staff of the corporation. It is also worth noticing that the operating costs of the CDC are very low, and bear favourable comparison with other similar organisations.

Like the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), I am worried about the issue of areas of operation. Indeed, during the period of the hon. Gentleman's enforced absence during the Minister's speech, I drew the Minister's attention to the issue of Gaza and the west bank. It seems to me—I think there is some recognition of that in the policy that attaches to the CDC—that it is thought to be legitimate that the CDC should operate in a region where some element of the interest of the United Kingdom arises.

Having visited Israel shortly before Christmas last year, and having continued since then to try to keep a monitoring eye on events in the middle east, and especially that part of the middle east, I am convinced that the success of the peace process established in the middle east, and especially involving the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Israeli Government, will largely depend on the extent to which the economic aspirations of many people in Gaza and the west bank can be recognised and fulfilled.

The Prime Minister's visit this week is timely and appropriate. I understand from some of the reports that he took with him many people with commercial interests, one of whom at least, I understand, said on the aeroplane on the way back that he would find it perfectly possible to work with any sensible Government, including, apparently, a Labour Government. Whether the Prime Minister thinks that the fare of that member of the party was justified is another matter entirely.

As I said, the success of the peace process will depend on the extent to which there is economic development. I cannot conceive of a region in which we have greater political interest at the moment than the middle east.

Having raised that case and indulged in what one might fairly call special pleading in relation to it, I am immediately conscious of the argument by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie that those with interests in the third world, and especially non-governmental organisations there, have a legitimate anxiety that expansion or possible expansion into eastern Europe will be at the expense of Africa.

Do the additional borrowing powers that the Bill now affords to the CDC suggest an intention that profits from impoverished parts of Africa will be used to finance new investments in eastern and central Europe? If that were to be the case, many hon. Members on both sides of the House would consider that an inappropriate way for the CDC to proceed.

Many hon. Members recognise the CDC's potential role in central and eastern Europe, but as has already been said, surely that should be done through the provision of additional funds—new money. It should not be done at the expense of other areas, particularly Africa, where the CDC has been traditionally active. The Minister properly referred to that when he listed a number of admirable CDC projects.

I have no criticism of clauses 1 and 2, which are perfectly sensible. Clause 3 relates to remuneration, pensions and allowances. I am pleased to note that they are to be determined by the Secretary of State and not by a committee of the Confederation of British Industry.

We will want to know from the Minister what Secretary of State expects to be the outcome of the new flexibility. Does he expect the total cost to go up or down? The word "flexibility" is often used to justify some change in policy. Those of us who have regard to public transport know that "flexibility" almost always means a reduction in service. When one talks about wages or the income of manual workers, "flexibility" almost always means a reduction in those wages or income. When used in the context of executives and board members, "flexibility" almost always means an increase.

Somewhere within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, someone must have done a calculation of the financial consequences of passing clause 3 into law. I should like to know precisely what estimate the Secretary of State has made of the consequences of doing that.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, by the end of 1993, the corporation was involved in more than 340 businesses, which provided, on a calculation, several hundred thousand jobs. The nature of those projects means that they often extend over 10 or even 20 years. They are therefore long-term investments in the economies in which they are placed.

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

We must ask ourselves whether some constraints have been placed on the activities of that success story to which it would have perhaps been preferable that the Bill had turned its attention. In particular, can the Minister tell me why the CDC continues to be liable to United Kingdom corporation tax, when the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs endorsed the recommendation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission that it should no longer be subject to that tax?

The Committee pointed out that, were it not subject to that tax, two things would flow from that. First, additional funds would be available by virtue of the remission of corporation tax. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the CDC's ability to negotiate favourable tax status in host countries would be enhanced. That would have a multiplier effect on the investments by the CDC.

The other element of finance that certainly requires consideration and explanation is the application of nil net funding and the least-cost rule. What consequences will they have on the CDC's ability to fulfil its responsibilities? To turn the matter round and put it in a more practical way, what additional amounts could be raised for the activities of that success story if neither nil net funding nor the least-cost rule were to be applied to the corporation?

The Bill is narrow in scope, but it leaves a number of important questions unanswered. I hope that we will have an early chance to return to them, because one thing is certain: as the debate has demonstrated so far, the corporation commands the attention and support of the House. If its success is such as has been justified in the debate, surely it is entitled to a greater freedom and an enhanced role.

5.4 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I should like to concentrate on one specific matter, which I hope that the Minister will be able to address.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies)—regretfully, he is not in his place now—intervened on the Minister and asked for categorical assurances that any investment entered into by the CDC would be subject to the most rigorous financial safeguards. In essence, he believed that, when considering an investment, the CDC should act like a private company, which has responsibilities to its shareholders. The Minister gave that categorical assurance.

We all agree that the resources given to the CDC are less than those that, ideally, we would like to give it. The only strictures governing the CDC that seem to matter relate to finance. Why do we not also issue strictures about the gross abuse of human rights that takes place around the world, and particularly in countries that are in desperate need of development and inward investment?

There is something illogical in judging the value of the individual nation state exclusively on the lowest possible wages that it is prepared to accept and the longest possible hours that it will demand its workers to work. That may balance the books according to accountants, but it neglects the greatest resource of any nation state—its people.

Developing nations are increasingly guilty of abusing human rights associated with work and the development of industry. Any kind of democratically based argument against impositions from central Government may preclude the introduction of human rights, but brings in its train human rights abuses. The nation state Government argue that such criticism of their action goes to the basis of the economic development of their country.

The abuse of human rights has meant that trade union leaders have been murdered and abused, many of them women. Newspapers have been closed down, and journalists have disappeared. Writers who speak out against the governing regime are forced into hiding in their own countries, or even flee their own countries to find sanctuary abroad.

One of my constituents has been the victim of the current gross abuse of human rights in a Commonwealth country, Nigeria. I refer to the daughter of Chief Abiola, who, as we know—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I hope that the hon. Lady will relate that example to something to do with the CDC. If not, she is not in order.

Ms Jackson: I began my argument by saying that the Government have issued certain strictures which relate exclusively to the funding and financial structure of the CDC.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have listened most attentively to the hon. Lady, and she was about to refer to an individual case. That case must relate to something to do with the CDC; otherwise, those comments are not in order.

Ms Jackson: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I might continue my argument a little further, I believe that it is equally important that implementation of the necessary CDC projects are governed just as much by respect for human rights in the third world as they are by financial considerations. I must admit that I had intended to cite another individual's case—that of Ken Saro Wiwa, another Nigerian who has suffered gross human rights abuses from his Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not a debate between the Chair and the hon. Lady. There are two Commonwealth debates today, and it would be entirely appropriate for the hon. Lady to raise individual cases affecting the Commonwealth in the second debate. We are on the Second Reading of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill. I hope that she will bear that in mind.

Ms Jackson: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but rather disappointed that it is impossible for you and me to have a debate on this matter. I shall certainly consider what you have said, and perhaps redraft my arguments.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: One of the principal arguments in the development movement over the years is that, before British support is provided, whether

through the CDC or via the Overseas Development Administration directly to overseas countries or corporations, there should be greater consideration of human rights. There is an argument that one should not allocate money to countries in which there are abuses of human rights. In the context of the individual cases about which my hon. Friend obviously wishes to speak, she might care to reflect on whether there should be CDC support for the countries in which those cases have occurred.

Ms Jackson: That was to be the main thrust of the argument that I was beginning to develop. We have established that there is limited funding for the CDC and for other development agencies. I do not think that any country can claim to have an absolutely clean slate on abuses of human rights, but it should be a prerequisite that no sizeable funding, and certainly no pump priming, should be provided to countries in which there are such abuses.

In Nigeria, pump priming has led to increased development of the oil industry.

Mr. Worthington: My hon. Friend's example of Nigeria is particularly appropriate. I understand that the CDC is no longer putting new investment into Nigeria, because of the human rights abuses of people such as Ken Saro Wiwa and Chief Abiola. Such abuses have convinced the CDC that Nigeria is not an appropriate place in which to invest money. That is to the enormous detriment of the largest black African country, which is being denied CDC resources because of its Government.

Ms Jackson: That is the essential point: it is the people in such countries who are suffering most grievously. As my hon. Friend has said, the Nigerian Government have been found repugnant by the CDC and by others, because of the way that they have totally ignored every kind of democratic principle, and have overthrown a duly elected President.

They have imposed a military regime which has been responsible for murder and rape and the illegal imprisonment of intellectuals such as Ken Saro Wiwa, who was held without trial from May 1994 until February of this year. He was subjected to torture in prison, and he was manacled and kept in the dark and without food for more than 60 days. The Government of Chief Abiola, who was the democratically elected President of that country, were totally overturned by a general, who was himself overthrown by a military coup.

Before my hon. Friend intervened, I was discussing pump priming. There should be a proviso that pump priming does not lead to the destruction of land, as is happening in Nigeria as a result of oil development. The land of the Ovoni people, whose leader is Ken Saro Wiwa, has been destroyed by what they claim are the grossly anti-environmental practices of Shell Oil in that region.

It is alleged that that is being done at the behest of the central Government, who are desperate for as much foreign revenue as they can suck in. It is also alleged that the money is not being spent in the best interests of that developing nation, but is being used for corrupt practices by an illegal regime.

Human rights should be central to the CDC's considerations when apportioning money to schemes. Such apportionment may begin with the best of intentions, but it gives little or no satisfaction to hon. Members or to the country to see desperately needed funds for developing countries being given to regimes which may occasionally provide bread and clean water and the beginnings of a health service and education, but which are mainly concerned with abusing human rights and human dignity.

I end where I began. Any consideration by the CDC of investment in schemes should not relate exclusively to economic realities and balances.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): My hon. Friend makes an important point—that, in deciding investment priorities, the CDC should look not only at whether a sound commercial case has been made for an investment which will work and contribute to a country's development, but also at the wider social circumstances in that country.

Although there has been no investment in Nigeria for the past year, for the reasons which my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) spelled out, some countries with human rights records which give rise to concern have had investments in recent years. One of those is Indonesia, which has occupied, against our Government's wishes, East Timor. I accept that Nigeria is extremely important, but would my hon. Friend like to press the Minister on the wider question of human rights abuses in some of the countries in which the CDC is currently investing?

Ms Jackson: I shall certainly put that to the Minister again. I would not expect a categorical assurance at the end of the debate, but in winding up perhaps the Minister will say whether the Government are thinking of taking on board the concerns that are being expressed not only by hon. Members and by non-governmental agencies and organisations but by people all over the world.

We wish to assist in the development of third-world countries and to ensure sustainable development for the world as an entity, and the issue of human rights should be central to funding and even to selecting projects. By pump-priming major schemes, we want to develop individual abilities and enhance human dignity. We do not want simply to make a few people very rich and a very large number even more abjectly poor.

5.17 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) has raised an interesting aspect of the debate. In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) spoke about Indonesia. Perhaps he is not aware that, according to the annual report of the Commonwealth Development Corporation, the CDC has an office in Indonesia—the country that stands charged before the United Nations with abusing civil rights in many ways.

I am sure that the CDC will want to pursue that issue and perhaps write to those of us who are present for the debate. Perhaps it will explain why it feels that,

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

in the context of current abuses, which are the subject of repeated representations in the House, it is in order for it to invest some of its money in that country.

Mr. Bayley: I should like to make a brief intervention about Indonesia. According to the latest annual report by the CDC, in the most recent year an additional £13 million was invested in three new projects in Indonesia. A further two are due to come on stream in the next financial year. It is not just a question of continued investment in Indonesia: by comparison with many other CDC eligible countries, it is a high level of investment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The mind boggles as we getfurther into this discussion. One wonders what more would come out if we had time to consider the documents that some of us have received only in the past few moments.

The debate on the Commonwealth Development Corporation (Raising of Limits on Borrowing and Advances) Order 1992 took place on 4 March in the 1st Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments. Baroness Chalker, the then Minister, is now in the other place. I argued that the name of the Commonwealth Development Corporation needed to be changed.

One recommendation in the quinquennial review states:

"Further consideration should be given in the context of a possible CDC Bill to the case for and against changing CDC's name".

I presume that much discussion had taken place in the Department. I argued that the name should be changed to either the British Development Corporation or to the International Development Corporation.

To some extent, my case is supported by recommendation 11 in the review, which states:

"There should not in future be a target for the proportion of investments in the commonwealth".

That suggests—I am not arguing against this; there might be sensible reasons for it—that the Government and the Commonwealth Development Corporation foresee playing a lesser role in Commonwealth countries as against other countries that might have equally important calls on resources.

I and many of my hon. Friends have visited countries where the CDC has done excellent work—I think, in particular, of Malaysia. I have visited projects there on two occasions, and I have seen the formidable work that has taken place, and the major contribution that has been made to the local economy. When I visit some countries, however, I sense a slight uneasiness when I mention matters to do with the British Commonwealth, especially in the context of the debate that is taking place on the World Service about the CDC's activities, which seem to promote principles of privatisation.

I am not expressing a reservation about the need to promote arguments about privatisation in certain parts of the world—they might be sensible arguments. The question is whether those arguments should be advanced in the context of an organisation that is referred to as the Commonwealth Development Corporation. It is as if we were exporting our culture through an organisation that, historically, has bound people in a family of nations. There is almost a patronising intonation when one is promoting such principles of privatisation.

If there is to be a reduced role in the Commonwealth, why do not we change the name? Why does it not become the British or International Development Corporation? Why do we have to hang on to a name that, in some people's minds, relates beyond the Commonwealth to the colonial past? To some extent, we should perhaps withdraw from using terminology that some people might interpret as neo-colonial. I am not suggesting that the Commonwealth is a colonial organisation today, but some people in underdeveloped countries might view it as such.

I understand that some work has been done in Vietnam. Why should the organisation be known as the Commonwealth Development Corporation in Vietnam? The Vietnamese may not want to be reminded of their experience under colonialism by an organisation that was previously named the Colonial Development Corporation. This is only a fine point, and perhaps I am labouring it, but it was sufficiently important for the quinquennial review to suggest that the matter should be discussed in the context of legislation to be brought before the House of Commons.

The review states:

"Over the next Quinquennium, at least 70 per cent. of board approvals each financial year should be for poor (IDA eligible) countries".

But in the debate, Baroness Chalker said:

"In 1987, we further agreed with CDC that at least 60 per cent. of new investment should be made in low-income countries".—[*Official Report, First Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments*, 4 March 1992; c. 3.]

I presume that a commitment was made in the review to increase the proportion of money that is spent in International Development Association, low-income countries. Was that recommendation accepted? Reading the Library brief, one is led to believe that it was. I should like it placed on the record that that principle has been accepted by Ministers.

I understand my hon. Friends' concerns about how precious moneys could be diverted from underdeveloped countries to the former Soviet Union and to eastern and central Europe. However, the CDC has a critically important role to play in that part of world. Not many organisations have the international expertise that it has.

Some years ago, when I had responsibility for these matters on the Labour Front Bench, my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and I had lunch with the CDC, when the issue was raised of the extent to which we should be involved in eastern and central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

I understand that Ministers have conceded that some developments may occur in that regard. I argue that we should substantially uplift our commitment—through organisations such as the CDC—to invest in eastern and central Europe by taking the route endorsed by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor). She said that we should allow the CDC to borrow more freely from commercial markets, and to be free from constraints. The Minister may correct me, but it may be that Treasury rules are restricting the CDC from deploying its experince.

5.28 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I apologise to the two Front-Bench spokesmen for not being here earlier. I was with the Foreign Minister from Cambodia. One reason why the Bill is going through is that it will enable the Commonwealth Development Corporation to borrow more money so that it can do its valuable work in Cambodia as well as Vietnam. It seems apposite to welcome the Bill and to say how much one supports it and, in particular, how much one supports the CDC.

Some years ago, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs carefully considered the CDC. All of us who have travelled and seen the CDC's work in so many countries, especially the most difficult countries, where inward and private investment is hard to attract, know that its achievements are remarkable.

One wants to support everything that anyone has said that is helpful to the CDC. I commend the Bill to the House, and I hope that it will be passed as quickly as possible. With its long experience in so many countries, the CDC brings tremendous benefit back to this country in terms of what we are able to achieve, but more particularly, it benefits the countries in which it operates.

5.30 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I welcome the Bill. Will the Minister give the House a definition of what the Government mean by "poor"? He said that a proportion of the funding—70 per cent. I believe—will go to "poor" countries. After the Pergau fiasco, the Government decided that aid and trade provision would no longer be given to countries with a per capita GNP of more than $700. Will the same level apply to the CDC loans in future?

Given that the Government will not in future be making contributions to the CDC's loan stock, and that moneys it lends will in future be coming from repayments from developing countries, I would be extremely uneasy if poor developing countries were paying back their loans to create a loan stock for relatively richer countries in eastern Europe.

What assurance can the Minister give the House that, if there is a policy change which allows an expansion of the CDC's operations in eastern Europe—which I broadly welcome—the loans made there will not be financed from repayments made by poorer countries?

5.31 pm

Mr. Baldry: I shall try to respond to the various points that have been made.

Sometimes, there seemed to be an internal debate about whether people want the CDC to invest in eastern Europe. What has come out of the debate is broad agreement and support for the work that the CDC does. I am proud to trumpet its success, and I am sure that colleagues from both sides of the House will trumpet its successes around the world and in the United Kingdom.

The Government's responsibility under the CDC Acts is to set out a strategic policy framework in which the CDC operates: it is not to second-guess it. Decisions on individual investments are the responsibility of the CDC board. There may well be occasions on which we would request the CDC to delay investments in countries where aid programme activities have been suspended on human rights grounds. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) raised some tension about the fact that one can sometimes withdraw support from a country and make things more difficult.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) mentioned Nigeria. The hon. Lady may wish to stay for the next debate and make a further contribution. We would all support the comments made today by the Commonwealth Secretary-General. He said that developments in Nigeria

"underscore the point that, unless and until the military Government speedily returns the country to democratic rule, Nigeria's current ills, including instability and potential for disastrous conflict, will continue to worsen."

I am sure that we all agree with that.

Many hon. Members asked about the coverage of the CDC. It is pretty comprehensive. It is now doing significant business in India and Pakistan, and more recent additions include South Africa and Vietnam.

The CDC asks for the Government's permission if it wishes to operate in a new country. Obviously, we look to the CDC to take a view on where it is best placed to deploy its skills. It is important not to spread financial and management resources too thinly.

In fact, the CDC has not asked for permission to invest in eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. If it did so, we would have to consider that request carefully, because a number of other bodies, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, already exist with a remit to promote investment in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. We would have to consider carefully whether the CDC had any comparative advantages over other organisations. As I have said, the CDC has not yet made such a request.

The CDC has not made any request about the west bank or Gaza. If it did, again we would give it careful consideration.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Can the Minister say what criteria the Government would take into account if such an application were made?

Mr. Baldry: Clearly, as has been evidenced by my comments about eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, it would depend to a certain extent on what other instruments there were to support those countries, whether we thought that the CDC could make a contribution, and the arguments that the CDC put to us.

For example, the CDC has been given permission to extend its work into central America—Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala—and has done so because that complemented the work it was doing with the Commonwealth Caribbean. That made a lot of sense. However, it has not made a request to extend its work into South America or China. We would consider such requests on their merits.

Some comments were made about the possibility of any changes in clause 3 leading to an expansion in the pay and remuneration of the board of the CDC. It is fair to put on record the fact that the board is currently made up entirely of non-executives. The annual report for 1993 shows that six of those non-executives drew a remuneration of less than £5,000, and only one drew

[Mr. Baldry]

a remuneration of up to £10,000. It is an incredibly cost-effective organisation in terms of the public service it provides.

There are a number of Scottish connections with the board. For a long time, Lord Reith—

Mr. Worthington: He is dead.

Mr. Baldry: I know that.

I was saying that Lord Reith was on the board in the 1960s and there is Sir William Ryrie now. There are some vacancies on the board. There is one woman on the board, but I will reflect on the comments made during the debate. It is important that the CDC reflects wide interests, but it is an organisation that needs to make important investment decisions. As hon. Members recognise, it needs to have the expertise necessary to make those decisions.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate meant to be critical of any of the CDC's projects, but I do not think that any project has ever drawn criticism from an overseas Government, from a non-governmental organisation or from anyone in the House. If there has ever been such criticism, I hope that hon. Members will draw attention to it subsequently. The projects that it has carried out have commanded broad support.

As to what the CDC has been called—

Ms Glenda Jackson *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Lady will be able to make her points in the next debate if she so wishes.

Ms Jackson: I cannot.

Mr. Baldry: Allow me to finish my point, and I will give way.

What the CDC has been called has been subject of considerable debate over the years. Clearly, an Act of Parliament started the Commonwealth Development Corporation, and it has been part of our contribution to the Commonwealth. It is now generally accepted that it is called the CDC.

If the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) looks at the annual report, he will find it hard to see the Commonwealth Development Corporation spelt out in full. It is known as the CDC. Bearing in mind what some of my hon. Friends have said about promoting the CDC, I do not think that changing its name again would help. Everyone knows it as the CDC. It is recognised around the world as the CDC, and it does a good job.

Ms Jackson: I did not intend any of my contributions to be critical of the CDC, or any of its past projects or projects in which it will engage in the future. I was concerned that, in an increasingly dangerous, highly competitive and ruthless world, it should be given assistance by the Government and this House by being allowed to take on board and, if necessary, having written into its strictures and structures, that an element of consideration for abuses of human rights should be part and parcel of its thinking.

Mr. Baldry: As I said, the CDC is already very sensitive to those issues.

One or two technical points have been mentioned. Several hon. Members referred to market rate borrowing. It is a long-standing principle that public sector bodies should not generally borrow on their own credit at a higher cost than that at which the Government can borrow. The matter has been considered thoroughly a number of times, and rejected on value-for-money grounds.

One or two hon. Members asked whether we were confident that the CDC felt it had sufficient powers. It is clear from the examples cited today that the CDC is involved in a wide range of activities throughout the world. I understand that it is considering some further activities, which it is not as yet confident are within its powers. Clearly, we are working closely with the CDC to resolve any problems and avoid any unnecessary constraints on its work.

Mr. Worthington: When the Minister reads his comments in the *Official Report* tomorrow, he will see that they mean nothing to anyone. He said, in effect, that things were being considered and that decisions would be made in the future. As we have asked about constraints on the CDC's work, it would be useful to know precisely to what issues the Minister was referring.

Mr. Baldry: There are a number of activities in which the CDC thinks it would like to invest, but it is not entirely confident that its present statutory powers cover them. That is a matter of discussion between us and the CDC.

Clearly, we do not want there to be any unnecessary constraints on its work. It is in the nature of things that, as financial markets change and as the possibilities of involvement in various operations change, the opportunities available to the CDC are increasing all the time. The original legislative framework for the CDC was set up some time ago, but we want to ensure that the CDC can do what it would like to do.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) mentioned taxation. He asked whether we would be prepared to treat the CDC differently from other trading corporations in the public sector which are taxed on the same basis as private companies, but I do not think that there are good grounds for doing so. The nature of the CDC's activities is not sufficient reason for special tax treatment, and it would be very difficult to distinguish the CDC from other bodies doing worthwhile work in the developing world.

I can tell the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) that I should be happy to have a long debate about the World bank and the International Monetary Fund. It would be an interesting subject for a Wednesday morning debate if he cared to bid for one, but, in fairness to the hon. Members who wish to speak in the next debate about the Commonwealth, this is perhaps not an appropriate time to undertake such a debate.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I have spoken to people in various parts of the world about the important issue of the CDC's name. In the event that the CDC developed a role in China, a country of 1,000 million people with immense

tradition, would the Minister think it right for the CDC to go into such a market calling itself the Commonwealth Development Corporation? That is a simple question.

Mr. Baldry: In fairness, the hon. Gentleman was not listening. If he reads *Hansard*, he will see that I said clearly that the CDC is an organisation that is known and promotes itself as the CDC. I have no doubt that if it went into China, it would do so as the CDC.

Last year, 80 per cent. of approvals were in the poorest countries, well above the targets agreed with Ministers. I shall gladly write to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) about the interesting matter of definitions—what constitutes a "poor" country or one of the "poorest" countries. Different organisations have different definitions, and it may be useful to reach an agreement on what the terms mean. However, there is no doubt that a large proportion of CDC's investments do go and will go to the poorest countries. At the moment, the figure is about 80 per cent.

Mr. Bayley: I thank the Minister for his comments. If, at some future date, the CDC starts investing in eastern and central Europe, those countries are likely to be among the remaining 20 per cent., or the "non-poor" countries. Will the Minister guarantee that the bulk of the fund—80 per cent. of CDC's investments—will remain in the poorest countries, however that is defined and whether their GNP is $700 or $1,500 per capita? The eastern European countries are richer than that.

Mr. Baldry: As I said, the CDC has not yet even applied to invest in eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. If it were to do so, one of the things that we would have to consider is the fact that other organisations are already able to invest there, so the hon. Gentleman raises an entirely hypothetical point.

There is wide support for the CDC and the Bill, and I hope that the House will grant it a Second Reading with acclaim.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Further proceedings postponed, pursuant to Order [14 March].

COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) any increase in payments out of the National Loans Fund, the Consolidated Fund or money provided by Parliament resulting from provisions of the Act—

(a) increasing to £1,100 million and £1, 500 million respectively the sums of £750 million and £850 million specified in section 9A(2) of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1978 ("the 1978 Act"); and

(b) removing the limit in section 10(1) of the 1978 Act on the amounts which may be advanced to the Commonwealth Development Corporation ("the Corporation") under that section;

and any increase in payments into the National Loans Fund or the Consolidated Fund resulting from such provisions;

(2) the making of interest-free advances to the Corporation under section 10(1) of the 1978 Act; and

(3) the remission of the payment by the Corporation under section 12(1) of the 1978 Act of interest on advances under section 10(1) of that Act.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill

Considered in Committee, pursuant to Order [14 March.]

Clause 1

ALTERATION OF LIMITS ON BORROWING ETC.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

5.47 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I seek some clarification. No one is suggesting that there should be no investment in eastern Europe. The Minister has been helpful but the research document, which I am sure that we have all been reading with great interest, clearly states:

"It is not impossible that the profits from past investments in the impoverished parts of Africa could be used to finance new investments in Eastern and Central Europe."

Our concern is that the profits made in Africa would be used somewhere else and that money that might have been invested there would be transferred elsewhere. Will the pot be large enough to prevent that from happening? Will the Minister give us some assurances on that point?

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that the CDC should claim additional funds only if it decided that it wanted to apply to operate in a completely different area such as eastern and central Europe? I hope that there is no suggestion that it should recycle funds from its existing portfolio so as to take on an area with such demands as central and eastern Europe.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): Hon. Members may have inadvertently been misled by the research document. It seems to have led them to believe that the CDC wants to invest in eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. It does not currently do so, has not asked permission to do so and, as far as I am aware, has no intention of asking to do so in the foreseeable future. As I have already said on several occasions, other bodies, such as the European bank for reconstruction and development, with a remit to promote investment in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, already exist. We would have to take all those factors carefully into consideration if we were to consider giving the CDC permission to invest in eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I shall refresh the Minister's memory of what was said by Baroness Chalker in 1992. When he makes statements, he might try to reflect on that. She said:

"there is a need for other expansion. I assure the Committee and the House that we are prepared, if necessary, to introduce primary legislation to expand the CDC's role. Subject to borrowing limits . . . there is nothing to stop CDC work in eastern Europe provided that there is sensible risk."

The now Baroness was thinking positively in 1992. She continued:

"We hear less about the other republics, but we are doing our best to find out more so that we ensure that help within the general aid programme is sent where it is needed. More information will enable us to find out how the expertise of the CDC can open opportunities . . . The British private sector, backed by Government funds, has gone in to help to create a private sector and new systems in Russia and Poland and, although conditions are slightly easier there, in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, too, CDC has much of the sort of expertise that could be well deployed."—[*Official Report, First Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.*, 4 March 1992; c. 11-13.]

That fairly positive statement was made almost three years ago to the day in Standing Committee. Yet, this evening, the Minister seems to be far more negative. Has there been a policy change in the Government's position? Has someone changed his mind since 1992?

I think we are all united in our view that there should be investment in eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. Some of us, however, are concerned about how the investment will be funded and to what extent we can draw on capital markets in the west, borrowing and lending at commercial rates to enterprises in eastern and central Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will take into account the commitments that were given in a one-and-a-half-hour debate in Standing Committee, about three years ago, by the present Baroness Chalker.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I understand from the Library brief that one of the proposals set out in the 1993 review was that there should be statutory change to allow the CDC to undertake consultancies not related to project investment. I am concerned that the Overseas Development Administration spends large sums on management consultants—generally United Kingdom consultancies—to advise on development strategies in the disbursement of the ODA's bilateral aid budget.

Surely it would make sense for a body with the expertise of the CDC to be able, in appropriate cases where it has relevant expertise, to offer to provide consultancy in respect of projects with which it is not concerned. In commercial—

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The clause relates to borrowing limits.

Mr. Bayley: I am asking the Minister, Mr. Morris, why the consideration to which I have referred did not form part of the clause. It is—

The Chairman: Order. It is not for an hon. Member to ask why something is not in a clause. At present, we are concerned with what is in clause 1. The hon. Member may wish to raise certain issues on Third Reading or on other clauses in Committee that we have yet to debate, but for the moment we are dealing with borrowing limits.

Mr. Bayley: I am guided by you, Mr. Morris. I shall resume my place.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am left wondering whether the Bill is premature. There remain unresolved issues. At the same time, as I said earlier, some of us on the Opposition Benches feel

disappointed that the Bill has not gone far enough. The Minister has referred to issues that have not yet been resolved, and it seems that there is doubt about whether they are within the competence of the CDC. That seems odd when we are considering a recently introduced Bill. I am convinced that the issues of competence relate to the CDC's competence to borrow from the commercial sector, for example.

I ask the Minister to try to explain the real issues that are now before the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in determining the role of the CDC where there is doubt about its competence. Such an explanation would be valuable. It seems—

The Chairman: Order. Such an explanation might be valuable but our rules are clear: we must deal strictly with clause 1, which relates to borrowing limits. As I have said, the Bill can be debated on Third Reading. Some of the issues that are now being raised could most appropriately be introduced at that stage. For the moment, the Minister, along with Back-Bench Members, must restrict himself to borrowing limits.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

REMUNERATION ETC. OF MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATION

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The research paper provided by the Library states:

"This Clause enables the Secretary of State to determine the remuneration, allowances and pensions of members of the Corporation".

Why was it necessary to propose the change that the clause would introduce, or is it a change? What was the motive in seeking to bring about the change and then removing the requirement for Treasury consent

"in relation to such matters"?

Perhaps I can understand the proposal to some extent because my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and I were previously advancing related arguments on a more general basis. Why should determination of the remuneration, allowances and pensions of members of the corporation be changed in the way that is proposed?

Mr. Baldry: The members of the board of the CDC at present are all non-executive directors. Unlike all other bodies, the chief executive is not a member of the board. Therefore, there is no control over the level of remuneration of the chief executive. Under the proposals set out in the Bill, the chief executive will become a member of the board. As a result, and consistent with other public bodies, there will be some control over the remuneration of the chief executive.

We do not envisage any increase in overall spending on the CDC as a consequence of those measures. We get extremely good value from the CDC in terms of the contributions that non-executive members make to the board. The clause is designed to ensure that arrangements are brought into line and are consistent with those that prevail in all other public bodies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Do I understand that the exercise of control in national health service trusts, for example, is no different from that in the CDC when it comes to the chairman's remuneration? In an odd way, an NHS trust is carrying out a similar function.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Are we on clause 3, Mr. Morris?

The Chairman: Yes, we are.

Mr. Forman: I am interested in subsection (5). I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to explain why it might be necessary to insert the "following paragraph", which is 5A. What special circumstances does he envisage in which it might be appropriate for the Secretary of State to approve compensation for someone who is ceasing to be a member of the corporation? Surely it is honour enough to be a member of the corporation. I am a great respecter of the CDC. Why should someone require or deserve compensation when ceasing to be a member of it?

Mr. Bayley: I have been searching through the latest copy of the CDC's report and accounts to discover information about the remuneration of directors—

Mr. Baldry: It is on page 72.

Mr. Bayley: I thank the Minister.

Mr. Baldry: I believe that I have dealt with the points raised by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

With regard to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), clause 3 ensures that the CDC is entirely consistent with regard to board structures, board remuneration and Treasury controls in respect of every other similar public body. There may well be circumstances when a person ceases to be a member of the board, and if the Secretary of State deems that there are special circumstances, in which it would be right that that person should receive compensation, that is a matter for the discretion of the Secretary of State. We do not envisage any immediate or likely circumstance when that will arise, but that brings the position into line with provisions in similar Bills.

6 pm

Mr. Forman: I hope that there is no question of having rolling two or three-year contracts for those people. My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that in the private sector generally, under the influence of the Cadbury committee and so on, there is a strong move away from that kind of thing.

Mr. Baldry: It is pity that my hon. Friend is a late arrival to this debate. The tragedy is that we are in danger of not paying full tribute to the members of the CDC board who give very valuable service for very little remuneration. If my hon. Friend considers the

[Mr. Baldry]

annual report, he will see that all the existing directors of the CDC are non-executive directors. They make a considerable contribution and considerable public effort for a token remuneration. We are simply ensuring that the CDC is on a par with any other similar organisation within the public sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 and 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment; read the Third time, and passed.

The Commonwealth

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

6.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): This is a welcome and timely debate. This week, the whole Commonwealth observed Commonwealth day. Here, at Westminster Abbey, Her Majesty the Queen, the head of the Commonwealth, attended a multi-faith service at which, for the first time since 1961, the South African flag was paraded with those of the 50 other Commonwealth members, and the flags of the Commonwealth fly today in Parliament square.

This weekend, the Queen returns to South Africa for a state visit. It will be her first visit since 1947, when she dedicated herself to the Commonwealth. South Africa's return to the Commonwealth family of nations marks a turning point, which I am glad the Foreign Affairs Select Committee has noted and remarked by undertaking its own inquiry into "The future role of the Commonwealth". Such work will help to focus our minds on what the Commonwealth can and cannot do.

In New Zealand in November, Heads of Government from the Commonwealth will meet once again for their two-yearly conference, the first at which South Africa will have been present for over 30 years: 30 difficult years for the Commonwealth, now happily behind us.

The Commonwealth's origins lie in the supple relations that evolved between London and the dominions up to 1947. It is now a very different body that encompasses nations that are linked to the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth, but which have rightly chosen to make their own way in the world. The Commonwealth has helped them to do so. The Commonwealth was set up not to withstand change, but to reflect and to respond to it. The Commonwealth has no formal constitutional structure: it relies on conventions and procedures that evolved by consent.

The Commonwealth has no voting rights or international legal authority, but that very looseness is a great advantage compared to other international institutions, which were often set up with a single purpose in mind and which are now having to adapt to a vastly different post-cold war world. The inherent flexibility of the Commonwealth gives it a freedom to respond to the times, and to help take forward the best interests of a quarter of the world's people.

The Commonwealth is as much an association of peoples as it is of Governments. The Commonwealth's organisations and peoples benefit from shared practices and beliefs, and not infrequently from the widespread use of English. The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, well described the Commonwealth's central attribute as its ability

"to bridge racial, ideological and economic divides and inequalities, assisted by its common language and common heritage".

We agree that the Commonwealth acts as a bridge in those ways.

Commonwealth countries comprise over a quarter of the world's peoples, from the tundra of Hudson bay to the lush rain forests of Guyana; from the deserts of

Australia and northern Nigeria to the olive groves of Cyprus. Every religion is represented, reflected in the Muslim, Jain, Sikh, Hindu, Jewish and Christian divines who spoke at Westminster Abbey on Monday, all subscribing to five Commonwealth affirmations, ending with a prayer for peace led by Mr. Gordon Wilson of Enniskillen, and a final affirmation:

"We affirm our common faith in the need to establish justice for every individual, and through common effort to secure peace and reconciliation between nations".

Our challenge is to translate those values into specific and beneficial actions.

Let me cite three down-to-earth Commonwealth organisations that daily put those values into practice in a concrete way. The first is the Commonwealth Foundation, which, on a budget of only £2 million, helps to keep alive and thriving a host of Commonwealth professional and other non-governmental organisations. It will hold its second NGO conference in New Zealand in June. We have helped to finance that meeting and believe it can do good work.

Well-known groups like the Commonwealth Games Federation and the Commonwealth Medical Association—*[Interruption.]* I knew that the Commonwealth Games Federation would bring a cheer from the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). Those two bodies and others bring together peoples from across the Commonwealth, such as Commonwealth architects and Commonwealth dentists, to share professional expertise, ideas and experience.

The second organisation is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We all know well the contribution that the CPA and parliamentarians make in promoting the cause of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The CPA reaches beyond the Commonwealth to countries looking to join or rejoin.

The CPA provides invaluable assistance, guidance and training. Its involvement begins long before elections are ever planned; it continues through the pre-election and election processes, and it stays on to ensure that advice is available on the spot after elections. The UK branch alone provides vital training and support in parliamentary practice and procedure to some 50 Commonwealth parliamentarians each year through seminars in the UK. There is an unrivalled wealth of experience among its members from all the Commonwealth, which provides a vital link with overseas parliamentary systems through the overseas visits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd)—the chairman of the CPA executive committee—reminded the House of the value of parliamentary workshops during the debate on the South Africa Bill last week. I share my hon. Friend's views on the usefulness and importance of such experience sharing, and my right hon. Friend Baroness Chalker and I will give his proposal for further support for CPA initiatives constructive consideration. If my hon. Friend and the CPA would like to talk to us about that, we would be interested to consider the CPA's ideas.

Thirdly, there is the Commonwealth Institute here in London. I am aware of the support that it enjoys in the House, but unfortunately its exhibitions have stayed still and visitor numbers have fallen off. Indeed, it looked at one time as if the Commonwealth Institute might have to close. That would have been a great sadness, but the building itself, which is remarkable in its way, needed major repairs, especially to its huge canopy copper roof.

I am delighted to say that the institute's supporters have devised a new exhibition concept, "Wonders of the World", which highlights some of the great natural wonders in Commonwealth countries. The Government have offered to make £2.4 million available provided the institute can raise £5 million in sponsorship commitments by July this year.

The institute has provided generations of schoolchildren and visitors to London with a window on the world of the Commonwealth. We hope that that can continue, and if the sponsorship target is met that will be a clear indication of the support that the Commonwealth enjoys in this country.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Many of us were very worried when the Commonwealth Institute was threatened with closure. I welcome what the Minister says, and I know from my contacts that there is now hope that it will continue. Many schools now try to arrange exchanges with Commonwealth countries. I know a school near Stroud that is arranging for a group of children to go to India. Far more such activities could be arranged, and they would fit in with the work of the Commonwealth Institute, but the Government must put in more money. Will the Minister consider helping schools to arrange exchanges with other Commonwealth countries?

Mr. Baldry: One of the advantages of the Commonwealth is that much can be done on a voluntary basis. Many exchanges take place around the Commonwealth, but one would have to have regard to where the money was coming from and how the exchanges were organised and attributed. Such schemes look attractive at first sight, but they could have substantial financial implications. Again, that is one of the topics that the Foreign Affairs Select Committee could consider when it studies the future of the Commonwealth. I see no reason why the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member who has ideas about how we could take forward Commonwealth initiatives should not put them to the Select Committee.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am glad to hear the Minister say such warm and appreciative words about the Commonwealth Institute. I too have visited it and have been impressed by the determination of Mr. Cox and his staff to take things forward, albeit on the basis of diminishing public financial support, which I believe will be phased out completely by 1999.

In developing his policy on the Commonwealth, will my hon. Friend take full account of the larger role that the Commonwealth Institute could play in acquainting people, especially young people, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said, with the great potential of the Commonwealth? Britain, as the mother country of the Commonwealth, should have a more

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

attractive window on the Commonwealth for all young people. Will my hon. Friend bear that aim in mind when deciding what support to give the institute?

Mr. Baldry: I entirely endorse everything that my hon. Friend says. That is why we have made it clear that we are prepared to support the Commonwealth Institute, but for the institute to move forward it must be viable and capable of demonstrating that it is viable. Sadly, in the recent past visitor numbers have fallen and exhibitions have remained fairly static. All that is now changing, and the institute has suggested advanced and bold initiatives for making itself more attractive. We hope that they will succeed, so as to enable future generations of children from here and elsewhere in the Commonwealth to benefit from the institute's work and from the educational opportunities that it can offer.

Few would dispute the value of the various forms of professional and non-governmental co-operation between the peoples of different Commonwealth countries, but when we ask what the co-operation between Commonwealth Governments means in practice the answer is more complicated. Charges of double standards, of vague and generalised communiqués and of exclusive concentration on particular issues at the expense of other matters equally important have in the past had a certain ring of truth. But even if we were to admit those falls from grace, two strands in the shared political activity between Commonwealth countries have proved their worth and will continue to do so.

First, the Commonwealth provides a conduit for a host of links for practical co-operation between Governments—links that otherwise would almost certainly not exist. Secondly and importantly, the Commonwealth as an association has a role in promoting good government and human rights.

On practical co-operation, let me cite just two instances, not of Britain supporting the Commonwealth but of other Commonwealth countries supporting each other. First, there is the interest that the Canadians take in the professional and economic well-being of Caribbean Commonwealth countries. That is not necessarily a logical connection, but the shared values in law, in education and in sport combine to ensure that those Caribbean states, which are small and sometimes vulnerable, can turn to a genuine friend for support.

Another example is provided by the programme that the Indian Government provide for African and other Commonwealth military personnel to receive training of the highest quality at the Indian staff colleges. Again, that is not an obvious connection, but the Commonwealth link has made it possible and fostered it. We should not forget, either, the immense network of educational co-operation throughout the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth teachers exchange programme enables more than 400 teachers and their families to swap schools for an academic year.

The Commonwealth scholarship and fellowship programme enables more than 500 students from Commonwealth countries to further their studies in other Commonwealth countries. The Association of Commonwealth Universities, a superb organisation that is little known outside its field, enables Commonwealth universities to exchange teachers, administrators and ideals. For example, it allows vice-chancellors from the Pacific to share problems with vice-chancellors from the West Indies or Asia. To attend one of the association's conferences is to see the Commonwealth as most imagine it should be.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Does my hon. Friend accept that the newest Commonwealth organisation, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, which has existed for only one year, represents a new step forward in the way in which we can foster good governance not only at central Government level but at the level of government that matters most to people—local government? Just today the Barbadian delegate to the Commonwealth Assembly asked for assistance in establishing local government in Barbados, which the Government are now seeking to bring about.

Mr. Baldry: I am glad to confirm what my hon. Friend says. Indeed, it was he who took through the House a private Member's Bill enabling local authorities in this country to give technical support to local government overseas. Only the other day, the deputy Minister responsible for local government in South Africa was in London attending a conference with a significant number of local councillors and others from this country. He talked about the local government elections that will take place in South Africa in October, and the support that can be given by this country in many different ways—for example, in terms of technical expertise and monitoring. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to another way in which the Commonwealth can be of assistance. When I visit Barbados later this year, I shall certainly pursue the issue of local government support for Barbados.

A second strand of Commonwealth intergovernmental co-operation, and perhaps the most important, is the contribution that the Commonwealth can and does make to good government and human rights. Of course, there have in the past been some very bleak spots. Idi Amin's Uganda was perhaps the most notorious, but the Commonwealth was able to help put Uganda back on its feet when Amin was overthrown.

Sadly, there are still some bleak spots today. In the Gambia, where the democratic government of Sir Dawda Jawara was shamelessly overthrown in July last year in a military putsch, the timetable for democratic elections, even if implemented, means that they will be delayed by at least two years.

Sadly, in Nigeria, which, rightly, was mentioned in the debate on the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill, the military Government's commitment to return to civilian democratic rule carries as yet little conviction. The pattern of ministerial dismissals, arbitrary arrests and bans on political activity undermines confidence in what the military Government profess to want to do.

In Sierra Leone, the Government of Captain Strasser have a programme for elections, but are hard pressed by rebel activity to put it into practice. Those problems actively concern Commonwealth Governments, and we welcome the lead that the Commonwealth

Secretary-General has taken in addressing them. The Secretary-General—himself a distinguished Nigerian—has observed:

"Nigeria cannot seriously aspire to wield any appreciable influence abroad or play a leading role in realising Africans' hopes unless it can put its own house in order".

Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland will wish to establish how they can help to reverse those setbacks.

We should recognise that relations between Commonwealth countries, too, have not always been harmonious. The tension between India and Pakistan causes concern to us, and to all other members of the Commonwealth—friends of both countries. Nevertheless, while the problems between India and Pakistan can best be resolved bilaterally, it is reasonable to think that they might have become more difficult if the Commonwealth link had not existed.

It would be idle to imagine that such problems will disappear; the question is, how is the Commonwealth equipped to respond? The picture is encouraging. After the long period during which South Africa preoccupied Heads of Government conferences, a fresh start was made in Harare in 1991 with the adoption of the Harare declaration, a detailed and clear commitment by all Commonwealth Governments to high standards in accountable, just government and the protection of human rights. The Commonwealth now has an objective benchmark against which to assess its own members' records.

In 1991, the Commonwealth Secretary-General launched a major programme to help Commonwealth states to organise multi-party elections in Zambia, the Seychelles, Guyana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Malawi. Commonwealth election observer groups have been preceded by technical missions to help in the organisation of elections, and by Commonwealth teams that have subsequently arrived—supplemented by teams from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and elsewhere—to assist in putting parliamentary democracy on a firm footing.

However hesitant and faltering those efforts may seem, they represent a collective act of will by 51 diverse Governments, with the moral authority that that commands. In a post-imperial world, that role for the Commonwealth should not be underestimated: we attach the highest importance to it. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister attends the Heads of Government conference in Auckland in November, the Commonwealth's role in sustaining democracy will be at the forefront of his priorities.

Nor should it be forgotten that Commonwealth countries play a full part in United Nations peacekeeping. Five of the top 10 contributors to UN peacekeeping are Commonwealth countries: ourselves, Pakistan, Canada, Bangladesh and Ghana. Commonwealth troops are currently in Kuwait, the former republic of Yugoslavia, Georgia, Rwanda, Western Sahara, Tajikistan, Liberia, Haiti, Angola, the Golan Heights and El Salvador. Commonwealth troops are making a major contribution to UN peacekeeping around the world.

An aspect that has tended to be overlooked in recent years is the importance of Commonwealth countries as trade and investment partners. The Commonwealth includes five of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies since 1985: Singapore, Mauritius, Botswana, Belize and Hong Kong. Commonwealth countries generally are now pursuing policies of political and economic liberalisation; exports to the Commonwealth, far from declining since our entry into the European Community, have grown by more than 20 per cent. in real terms since 1983.

The dynamic emerging economies of Asia—Malaysia and Singapore, for instance—have contributed to our economic growth in recent years. In the past five years, our exports to Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia have increased by 100 per cent. India, too, shows signs of becoming an increasingly important trading partner as the benefits of economic reform take effect. The Indo-British partnership initiative has been a great success, and South Africa and Pakistan clearly also have export potential. More than 60 per cent. of our exports to the Commonwealth are now to the "new" Commonwealth.

But it is not all one way. In 1993, Britain was a major importer from 35 of the 39 Commonwealth countries for which we have up-to-date statistics. Our balance of trade with the Commonwealth is healthier than our balance of trade with the European Community or the rest of the world. Commonwealth countries are an important recipient of British investment: some £36.8 billion, nearly a quarter of our investment stock, is held in those countries, over 40 per cent. of it in the new Commonwealth.

Britain's entry into the EC has been seen by many Commonwealth countries as a benefit, not only for their exports to the UK but because it opens up new European markets. The absolute level of trade with Commonwealth countries has held up well since Britain joined the EC. We argued for the creation of the European Union banana regime in the face of virulent opposition from some of our European partners which have no special links with traditional banana-producing countries.

We hope that the regime has given the Commonwealth countries a breathing space during which they will restructure their industries and make their economies more competitive—a process with which we are willing to assist them. There will be further threats to the regime, both from within Europe and from further afield, but we remain committed to defending the fundamentals of the regime to protect the interests of our Commonwealth friends.

Rum is one of the industrial successes of the Caribbean Commonwealth. We have argued strongly for the ending of the anomalous arrangements under the Lomé convention, which restrict rum exports from African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to the European market. EC quotas on "light rum"—90 per cent. of ACP production—have now been abolished; as a result of determined UK pressure, the quota for "traditional rum" has been set at three times the level originally proposed by the Commission. With further increases of 3,000 hectolitres each year before total abolition in the year 2000, we believe that that offers the Caribbean rum industry the opportunity and incentive that it needs to continue its successful development.

Those are two instances of the way in which our membership of both the Commonwealth and the European Union has enabled us to play a constructive

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part. A third and more recent contribution was made in the recent fisheries dispute. I think that I can best summarise that contribution by reading a communiqué given to diplomatic editors today by the Canadian high commissioner in London. It states:

"The Canadian High Commissioner, the Hon. Royce Frith today (Thursday, March 16) phoned the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to thank the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs for his very helpful role in bringing the parties to the negotiating table, as the British and Canadian governments had sought to achieve from the beginning."

That is another instance of the way in which our membership of both the Commonwealth and the European Union enables us to play a constructive part.

Commonwealth countries are close trading partners. Many are countries whose further development we seek to encourage through our aid budget. It is our policy to maintain a large and effective bilateral aid programme; because of our historical links, it is right that the largest share of British aid should go to Commonwealth countries. Of the top 10 recipients of bilateral aid in 1993-94, six—India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Uganda—are Commonwealth members. Bilaterally, we also have large "good government" programmes in a number of Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth as an institution has also provided us with a useful opportunity to emphasise the need for good government, and the importance of economic and political reform.

In 1993-94, £625 million, well over half our gross bilateral public spending on aid, went to Commonwealth countries. In the context of multilateral aid, our objective is to ensure that Commonwealth aid programmes meet real needs in developing countries by providing assistance—such as aid to small island states—that lies within their areas of comparative advantage over other aid agencies.

In that context, it may be helpful if I reiterate our position on the European development fund and Lomé. We have announced our intention to contribute a substantial sum to EDF VIII. It will be a significant reduction in cash terms on our contribution to EDF VII. We are not taking a position on the overall size of EDF VIII; nor are we making a judgment on the quality of the EDF. The reduction has been made because we are trying to achieve a better balance between multilateral and bilateral aid.

We expect multilateral aid to reach around 60 per cent. of total British aid in several years' time; EC aid alone will be more than 40 per cent. of the total UK aid programme. We also need to contribute to a substantial replenishment of the International Development Association both this year and in three years' time. Multilateral commitments are growing all the time.

Against that background, our objective is to maintain a substantial bilateral programme. We intend to continue to be a major contributor bilaterally to the development process in ACP countries, particularly in Africa. Our commitment to Africa remains strong. We are giving £850 million of bilateral aid to the special programme of assistance for Africa, which is a multi-donor effort co-ordinated by the World bank. A strong bilateral programme ensures that we have the ability to make the decisions to support countries in the Commonwealth.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): My hon. Friend shows great mastery of his brief. Does he agree that Commonwealth countries might take great comfort from our taking between £8 million and £11 million from our Overseas Development Administration bilateral aid budget and using it to rejoin the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation so that we could further promote education, science and culture?

Mr. Baldry: We will need to consider whether to join UNESCO on its merits. As my hon. Friend knows, we left it because we did not think that it was serving its purpose well. In due course, we will have to consider whether to rejoin UNESCO. We have to take each organisation on its merits and consider whether it serves well the interests of those whom it has been set up to serve.

Our bilateral aid is very much valued and appreciated throughout the Commonwealth. It might be of interest to the House if I read what the Ugandan Minister of Finance wrote only a matter of days ago to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He said:

"I would like to express to you and to Her Majesty's Government the most sincere gratitude of my own and that of the Government and people of Uganda for the vital concern which Great Britain has shown consistently about the crushing burden of debt which Uganda and other Sub-Saharan African countries are shouldering.

As you know, the first fruits of your most commendable efforts came with the write-off of the greater portion of our Paris Club debts this month. For my part, I can only promise you and Her Majesty's Government that the generosity of the Paris Club members to Uganda will not be frittered away. We shall stay the course of economic reform and liberalization upon which the growth of our economy so critically depends.

We trust that with an expanding economy, Uganda will progressively fend for herself and eventually meet her international obligations.

Once again, thank you so much."

Uganda and many Commonwealth countries which we support with development aid recognise that Britain has taken a leading role in tackling the problems of debt. They recognise that our bilateral programme of aid is of great benefit to them.

We also support the Commonwealth secretariat. We contribute up to 30 per cent.—just less than £3 million—of the secretariat's programme and running costs, which in 1994-95 will amount to £9 million.

Those links are reinforced by regular ministerial contact between members and fellow countries in the Commonwealth. During the past three years, there have been ministerial visits to 41 Commonwealth countries. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been to Canada, Cyprus, India, Malaysia and South Africa, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and Ministers across Government remain in close contact with Commonwealth colleagues on matters of common concern. We have frequent visits from Commonwealth Heads of Government to the United Kingdom.

All Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in New Zealand will have an interest in the implementation of the Harare declaration. It would be neither credible nor worthy to ignore those countries whose Governments fail to match principle and practice. The Commonwealth would be false to its vocation if it failed to respond meaningfully, convincingly and effectively to the challenges posed by military Governments. Other members will have their own priorities for the meeting in Auckland. Some will have an interest in helping Fiji to return to the Commonwealth. Fiji has begun the process of reviewing its constitution.

The summit will also have to deal with Cameroon's application to join the Commonwealth. Two years ago at Limassol, Heads of Government said that they would be ready to welcome Cameroon at Auckland, provided that by then its efforts to establish a democratic system, consistent with the Harare declaration, had been completed. We think that Cameroon may still have some way to go to meet that requirement, but it is of interest that there are countries that wish to join the Commonwealth.

We cannot anticipate the agenda at Auckland, but at the meeting in Limassol two years ago, for example, the Prime Minister, with Mr. Keating, the Australian Prime Minister, was able to persuade the conference to adopt a short declaration on the GATT Uruguay round, to launch a Commonwealth mission to press for its conclusion and to allow that Commonwealth mission to speak on behalf of Commonwealth countries as a group. That was a useful initiative, which demonstrated the ability of the Commonwealth to respond to concerns of the day.

Provided the Commonwealth adheres to realities and achievable goals, and eschews the temptation of grandiose or hollow declarations, it can and will remain a force for good. It is in that spirit that we approach the next Heads of Government conference in New Zealand in November. The conference will be the first to be attended by South Africa since 1961. That will give the Auckland meeting a special character. Given the attention that the Commonwealth has paid in the past 30 years to South Africa, it would be entirely proper for the Commonwealth and its members to continue its special efforts to meet South Africa's post-election needs, as it has done for other countries after independence.

If South Africa remains stable and prosperous, the whole of southern Africa—Commonwealth countries in large part—will benefit. If South Africa fails to realise its potential, the prospects for Africa as a whole, much of it Commonwealth Africa, will be diminished. The Commonwealth as an association remains engaged in South Africa at a moment when practical support may make a decisive difference.

Between now and November, new issues may well arise on which the Auckland conference can usefully comment. We certainly see scope for the Commonwealth working together, doing more to combat drugs, drug trafficking, money laundering and organised international crime as a whole. At the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Canada last year, that issue attracted the support of parliamentarians right across the Commonwealth. We will be talking to our Commonwealth partners about our ideas on how we can work together better to handle drugs and international crime between now and next November.

The Commonwealth has no big battalions on its own account. It cannot enforce, it cannot direct and it operates by consensus. In a world of strains and conflicts, the Commonwealth helps to promote a sense of shared values, shared responsibilities, shared histories and shared experience. There is much that the Commonwealth can do together and should do together to promote shared values.

6.37 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I join the Minister in welcoming the debate and in thanking the Leader of the House for the allocation of time for it. It is the first debate that we have had on the important topic of the Commonwealth since 1987, and a great deal has happened since then.

There will be a great deal of bipartisanship in the debate. The Minister, knowing me, would be disappointed—

Mr. Baldry: Devastated.

Mr. Foulkes:—devastated, indeed, if the debate was completely bipartisan. He will certainly not be disappointed. The temptation in a debate on the Commonwealth is to make a tour d'horizon—if my French is acceptable—of the 51 states and give some commentary on each one. Hon. Members will be glad to know that I intend to resist that temptation.

As I was not able to attend the debate on the South Africa Bill last week, I should like to take this opportunity to welcome South Africa back into the Commonwealth fold after an unfortunate isolation of more than 30 years. The elections in South Africa last year and the resulting end of a universally despised apartheid regime were welcomed by all, particularly by those in the Commonwealth and by those in this House who made it their especial task year after year, Question Time after Question Time, debate after debate, to highlight the divisions and the racial injustices in a society which offended human and democratic values. It has been a long and painful journey for the people of South Africa, and it is by no means yet complete. We have a great deal more to do to help the people of South Africa.

I am glad that South Africa's re-entry into the Commonwealth family has been precipitated at a very early opportunity. It will enable the Commonwealth to further its common values in a country which was devoid of such principles during its long isolation. A stable South Africa will benefit other nations of the Commonwealth especially, as the Minister rightly said, in Africa, which is dominated by Commonwealth countries.

The evolution of the Commonwealth is progressing at a pace which is quicker than ever. The changing nature of an institution born of British imperialist tendencies is marked and the opportunities for Britain and for our Commonwealth partners, economically, politically and culturally, are there to be grasped. The Commonwealth is no more a crude remnant of colonialisation or, as Disraeli once described it,

[Mr. Foulkes]

"a millstone around our necks".

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): That was before the Commonwealth.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman is right, of course—I just could not bring myself to say the word "empire", as I am sure he will appreciate.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The hon. Gentleman need not worry; I shall be saying it later.

Mr. Foulkes: In 40 years the Commonwealth has grown from a few dominions to 51 wholly independent members with populations ranging from a few thousand people to several hundred million. With a total population of around 1.5 billion people, the Commonwealth is the largest multilateral organisation in the world, other than the United Nations, and covers a quarter of the world's land area. I agreed with the point made by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) about the need for us to rejoin UNESCO, and I was disappointed that the Minister did not give a more positive reply; it is good that some of his Back Benchers keep reminding him.

The Commonwealth spans a quarter of the world's land area and its peoples derive from all five continents and from every major regional bloc and economic zone. It makes up 25 per cent. of the United Nations General Assembly, uniting large and small, developed and developing nations. There are still remnants of the empire, of course, in the shape of the dependent territories. I do not intend to deal with all of them, but from what my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said just now, it seems that he intends to spend some time talking about them if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Sadly, as we all know, one dependent territory—Hong Kong—is to leave the Commonwealth in 1997. I hope that the Minister recognises the concerns of hon. Members of all parties for the maintenance of democracy and human rights in Hong Kong after 1 July 1997. China has agreed to one country and two systems. The system in Hong Kong is a matter not just of capitalism as opposed to communism but of democracy, which is an essential part of that system and must not be tampered with. I hope that the British Government will make that clear to the Government of China.

I shall not dwell on the Falklands, a group of islands on which I have had enormous pleasure on occasions, but I shall briefly mention the Caribbean dependent territories. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office should spend more time looking at the future of those territories. Labour Members accept that those territories should not be pushed unwillingly to independence, but there should be maximum internal autonomy. I have been concerned over the past few years by the actions of governors in relation to the elected Governments of those dependent territories. It is a delicate relationship, and middle-rank Foreign Office diplomats do not always possess the necessary sensitivity to deal with it.

Some people describe the Commonwealth as lacking a modern role and as needing revitalisation and energy. I understand their concerns, but a role is being fulfilled. There have been whispers of the demise of the Commonwealth based on the old view of it. There is a feeling—I hope that it is not shared by anyone in this House—that since South Africa has sorted out its immediate problems, our work is complete. Neither of those assumptions is true. Indeed, as the Minister rightly said, more countries are seeking to join the Commonwealth. He mentioned Cameroon, but Mozambique, Eritrea and Angola also want to join. Namibia, of course, has already joined.

The Commonwealth has committed members around the globe, particularly in Africa, who are also involved in their own regional organisations. The Minister rightly mentioned the role that the United Kingdom can play as a bridge between the Commonwealth and the European Union. I welcome what was said by the Canadian high commissioner. I certainly do not criticise our Government over what was done.

Equally, all other Commonwealth countries have their own regional networks to plug into. There is the North American free trade agreement, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the Pacific rim, the preferential trade area for eastern and southern Africa, and many more. The Commonwealth transcends those groupings and provides opportunities—multilaterally and bilaterally—in areas of economic aid, of trade and of global security.

Many advantages of membership are evident. The Commonwealth's very diversity can often be its strength. The Minister mentioned the multi-faith service. The development of understanding between, for example, Islamic Pakistan, the Christian Caribbean, Buddhist Sri Lanka, and the commitment to opposing racial prejudice has been significant in the Commonwealth's approach.

The ideals of the Commonwealth are also those of democracy and the democratic process, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government, fundamental human rights, equality for women, universal access to education, sustainable development, the alleviation of poverty in member countries, protection of the environment, and the promotion of international consensus on major issues. It sounds a bit like our new clause IV—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): It is very tempting.

Mr. Foulkes: It is indeed.

All those ideals, however, are not prevalent throughout all the Commonwealth countries. Indeed, they are not all prevalent in the United Kingdom. I could spend some time addressing that topic, but I shall not do so. Instead, I will refer to events such as the military coup in the Gambia and the human rights abuses in Nigeria. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) raised the latter point in the previous debate.

I was also pleased at the way in which the Minister spoke about Nigeria as there is great concern about the situation there. Lord Avebury, as chairman of the parliamentary human rights group, has written to the Nigerian high commissioner expressing concern about the arrest of General Obasanjo and the health of Chief Abiola. I hope that the Minister will follow up his very welcome expressions of concern by making direct representations to the Government of Nigeria through its high commissioner.

The Commonwealth ideal is not yet universal even within the Commonwealth countries, although much has been achieved over the past few years and many groups have worked hard to further the core Commonwealth ideal of democracy. As the Minister said, in the Seychelles and Ghana, we have seen a return to multi-party democracy after one-party rule. In Lesotho, military rule gave way to a democratically elected Government. In Guyana, where I was present during the elections as an observer, and in Pakistan, many election observers witnessed peaceful changes of Government by democratic means: all progress in the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth secretariat, which was set up during the first Wilson Government in 1965, has advanced the democratisation of countries and, as the Minister said, it plays a substantial role in combating drug trafficking and abuse, in attempting to help the wave of refugees, in problems of third-world debt, in technical and medical co-operation, in environmental strategies and much more. Many hon. Members, especially those who have turned up for this debate, will have witnessed the work that the Commonwealth secretariat and other Commonwealth organisations are doing at first hand and will wish to refer to that aspect.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is an organisation of which I have a special knowledge and for which I have special affection. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) knows, I am the joint honorary treasurer; the other is the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so the House will appreciate that I do all the work.

I see the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) in his place; he is chairman of the United Kingdom branch and I know that he welcomes the fact that a Scotsman is joint honorary treasurer. I welcome the Minister's statement that he is willing to talk about supporting delegations, seminars and further activities because, throughout the Commonwealth, those help to strengthen political, cultural and economic links among all countries and help us to encourage the development of democratic ideals.

The CPA provides a permanent parliamentary focus for the most diverse group of nations within the United Nations and is the sole means of regular consultation among members of Commonwealth Parliaments. The membership continues to thrive here in Westminster, highlighting the extent to which hon. Members and peers value its work. We have more than 565 members in the Commons alone and I hope that hon. Members who are not yet members will soon join.

Mr. Dewar: How much does it cost?

Mr. Foulkes: It is not very expensive, and it can be seen as an investment. The commitment of Commonwealth Members of Parliament is also well known.

In an intervention, the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) rightly mentioned that the democratic process has to move further down to the grass roots within the Commonwealth. The need for local and regional government has long been recognised in this country. Sometimes we have wandered—the previous Prime Minister started to abolish some of our local government, but it has been generally recognised as an area in which the Commonwealth can further its ideals.

Although in its infancy in some developing countries, the democratic process can be given the wealth of experience that is present in other Commonwealth states. Local democracy is a key element of the democratic process. As a former councillor, I know that. The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Anyaoku, recognised that fact when, in addressing the 40th CPA conference in Banff, Canada, he referred to the "effective devolution of power" and said:

"a rigorous and strong system of local government should contribute to, and strengthen parliamentary democracy".

The establishment of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in 1994 as a new Commonwealth body to promote local democracy and community development is greatly to be welcomed and I pay tribute to the work of the hon. Member for Broxtowe. We now have 77 organisations with Commonwealth in their title and the number is growing at the rate of three per year. As the Minister said, they are responsible for the Commonwealth games, the Commonwealth human rights initiative and others. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum will significantly strengthen the Commonwealth's ability to encourage the development of local government, and Opposition Members welcome it.

The forum works closely with local government in the United Kingdom and will allow effective utilisation of the provisions of the hon. Member for Broxtowe's Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993, under which local authorities can become actively involved in overseas activities. We shall have to be careful which authorities they are. To take a random example, Lady Porter's would not be an obvious choice, and I am sure that Conservative Members have other suggestions. To date, the CLGF has undertaken initiatives in countries such as Malawi, Tanzania and South Africa, where the focus is on induction programmes for newly elected councillors.

I have concentrated on democracy at national and local level, but, however important, it cannot alone answer all the problems of our developing partners in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth recognises the essential link between democracy and socio-economic development. The Commonwealth and the heads of each of its Governments should accept that there are developing countries which have maintained impeccable democratic credentials, but which are still struggling with crippling developmental problems.

Our calls for increasing and improved democracy must be accompanied by effective co-operation in tackling those major socio-economic problems. Poverty and hardship can breed social unrest, disillusionment with the democratic process and rejection of the principles that we value so highly. The culmination can often be extremism of the left or the right, or military takeovers—the rise to power of the sort of Governments that the Commonwealth has sought to eradicate. That is a very real problem as people are overwhelmed by the weight of poverty that ensues.

Whatever the Minister said—with all his fine words—the only answer is one that has seemed to elude Conservative Governments in the past 16 years. Since 1945, the Conservative party has been perceived as resisting the tide of decolonisation and staying true to the ideals of imperialist Britain and the 19th century Conservative objective of

"upholding the Empire of England."

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Not at all.

Mr. Foulkes: I remind the hon. and learned Gentleman of Baroness Thatcher's struggle to avert pressure on white South Africa, which epitomised that trend. If she had had her way, we would not have put pressure on white South Africa to end apartheid. Her understanding of the Commonwealth principles of democracy was shown in her message to the Commonwealth conference in 1987, when she said:

"Anyone who thinks that the ANC is going to run the Government in South Africa is living in Cloud-Cuckoo-Land".

The right hon. Baroness is the one who is living in cloud cuckoo land. Some Conservative Members, including most of those here today, have had a more enlightened attitude, but she was the Prime Minister and the Head of Government.

The manner in which the Heath Government entered the European Community caused some resentment among our Commonwealth friends, but equally—I know the background of the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), the parliamentary private secretary, and his family history—the view taken by some Conservative Members that we can return to a position in which the Commonwealth is seen as a substitute for Europe is not realistic. The Commonwealth recognises that it has changed its role. It is of growing political influence, but not an economic grouping for its members' self-interest. The question of Europe or the Commonwealth was rightly described by Chief Anyaoku, who said:

"Europe and the Commonwealth cannot be adversaries, but partners in a common cause."

The Government are not heeding the message that democracy on its own is not enough for our developing Commonwealth neighbours, despite the Minister's fine words. Overseas Development Administration bilateral aid to Commonwealth developing states has dropped nearly 30 per cent. I have the statistics here, so the Minister cannot deny that. Aid to Commonwealth multilateral bodies has also declined. The Commonwealth's multilateral aid arm, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, is also suffering from the restricted budget.

The Commonwealth gets some large sums of money from the aid and trade provision budget, however. For example, £234 million was wasted on the Pergau debacle and £2.9 million was wasted in Botswana on a flight information project—money that should have been spent on basic human needs such as health, education, safe water and sanitation, things that the countries of Africa desperately need. I have one simple statistic—the £234 million wasted on Pergau is close to the £215 million that was cut from the Commonwealth aid programme to Africa in 1992-93, which shows the Government's priorities.

When we look at the social and economic statistics for some of the developing countries in the Commonwealth, we can understand why those prestige projects are viewed with such contempt. Many countries, including Bangladesh, Malawi, Swaziland and Tanzania, still have an infant mortality rate of more than one in 10; five countries have a life expectancy of less than 50 years; and the number with access to safe drinking water is less than 20 per cent. in some of the rural populations of Africa.

The Minister mentioned debt. The debts which many Commonwealth countries owe to developed countries run to billions of pounds, with a handful owing more than 100 per cent. of their gross national product. There was outrage at the European development fund discussions in Brussels when Baroness Chalker embarrassed our European counterparts, disgraced the United Kingdom and showed contempt for the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries present. She collapsed the talks when she proposed a cut of 30 per cent. from the European development fund. That shows the Government's lack of concern for many of our fellow Commonwealth countries.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman says that we should do more to help countries such as Bangladesh, but does he not find it curious that, under the existing Lomé system, more European development fund money goes to countries like Mauritius than to Bangladesh? We have many concerns about how the EDF operates, and it must be right for Britain to have a strong bilateral aid programme.

Mr. Foulkes: I have heard the arguments from the Minister and Baroness Chalker about why we should cut the European development fund to put more money, allegedly, into the bilateral programme, but that is not the answer; both programmes need to be maintained. The problem is that the whole fund for overseas aid has been continuously decreasing over the past 16 years, which is why the Government have to make that cut—they cannot maintain the bilateral aid programme on a reducing budget. The Minister must know that many excellent opportunities exist to use the Lomé convention and European Community mechanisms to aid the developing world. The EC-ACP Lomé relationship is separate from our direct relations with the Commonwealth, but equally valuable.

As the Minister said, the Commonwealth's future is to be examined by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. That is to be welcomed on both sides of the House. I certainly welcome the debate that will ensue as a result of that study, as it will show the advantages and benefits which exist for all members and it will analyse the Commonwealth's changing role and global importance. In all its activities, the Commonwealth benefits from shared practices and beliefs, and from the shared language of English which for most of us, though not all, is our native language. The modern association consists of three layers—Government; Commonwealth secretariat and other inter-governmental bodies; and the 77 Commonwealth non-governmental organisations.

The Minister mentioned the Commonwealth Foundation and I endorse what he said about it. I could say much more about the work that it does for young people and its range of activities. I had the privilege today of talking with a member of staff from the Commonwealth Foundation who, unlike the Prime Minister, was in Copenhagen at the social summit—

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I was there, too.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend was also there and she, too, will testify to the value of the social summit,

the networking which took place there and the links that it provides between Governments and non-governmental organisations. It is a great pity that the British Government were not properly represented there.

The Minister mentioned another Commonwealth institution—the Commonwealth Institute—and tried to take credit for the fact that the Commonwealth Institute will, it is hoped, survive. The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) should perhaps take some credit for that, as he argued against a cut of £2.7 million in Government funding, but the Government ignored him, so it is no thanks to the Minister or the Government if the Commonwealth Institute continues. The Labour party hopes that, despite the elimination of the grant to the Commonwealth Institute over the next few years, the institute will nevertheless survive. It is another example of the Commonwealth's commitment to the work of young people and education.

I make no apology for quoting for a third time the excellent Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Chief Anyaoku. He described the Commonwealth's central attribute as

"its ability to bridge racial, ideological and economic divides and inequalities, assisted by its common language and common heritage."

Coupled with a commitment to democracy, the "Commonwealth way", as it has become known, is respected throughout the world. A commitment from the Minister to the Commonwealth's future role and a substantial aid budget to our partners in the Commonwealth would be welcomed by both sides of the House today.

We certainly look forward to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in November, to which the Minister referred when he listed the range of topics on the agenda. We would look forward to it even more if there were an election in October and a Labour Government representing this country in Auckland to look after the true interests of the people of the Commonwealth.

7.5 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). He and I have worked long on Commonwealth Parliamentary Association matters, as he is joint treasurer and I am the recently retired chairman of the United Kingdom branch. One of the charms of that organisation is that, because all its members are parliamentarians, they are all honourable friends, so it is sometimes difficult not to address hon. Members across the Chamber as "my hon. Friends". The fact that we work together is a characteristic of that organisation.

I join other hon. Members in thanking the Leader of the House for providing time for this debate. Curiously enough, one of the benefits of the Jopling system is that it has made time available to get round to debates that we have wanted to have for many years but have been unable to have.

I also thank the Minister for his positive approach to the debate. Some of us were worried about the Government's underlying commitment to and feel for the Commonwealth, especially in the light of the European debate. To have a positive approach demonstrated tonight is reassuring and I am certain that that reassurance will be felt beyond the Chamber.

I also thank him for his earlier reference to a remark that I made exactly a week ago when I raised the question of parliamentary workshops in southern Africa. Work is well advanced on preliminary budgets and, even now, feelers are being put out for an early meeting. I should like to be in a position to report to the half-yearly meeting of the international executive committee my thoughts on that matter, and the thoughts of my hon. Friends in the Government on it will be extremely helpful.

The benefits that those workshops can bring are enormous and it is well understood throughout the Commonwealth, although not yet, alas, throughout the world, that the CPA is unique in providing professional development of parliamentarians. We are just at the end of the 44th parliamentary seminar here in Westminster, which is aimed at that development of parliamentary expertise.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: It finishes tomorrow.

Mr. Shepherd: As my hon. and learned Friend, the current chairman of the association's UK branch, says, it finishes tomorrow.

The debate is timely for us as we try to formulate thoughts in advance of the Auckland Heads of Government meeting in November. It is also timely in making it obligatory for us to go back and look at the Harare communiqué of 1991, which, as the Minister said, was a remarkable document as it was a reassurance and a restatement of Commonwealth principles. Paragraph 9 of the communiqué contains a declaration that is often quoted. I shall not quote it again as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley already set it out, but it is every bit as valid today as it was then. It is a good foundation. In paragraph 12, there is an explicit invitation to the CPA to play a full part in promoting the objectives of the Harare declaration.

As was acknowledged—because that was very much part of the theme, the CPA as parliamentary wing of the Commonwealth—the CPA has responded with vigour to that invitation. Mention has been made of the election monitoring and observing missions that have been undertaken in conjunction with the Commonwealth secretariat. We have the ability to draw on a vast resource of members in all parts of the world, who are capable of understanding what they are witnessing in the different areas in which the elections that they are invited to observe take place.

The specific realm of excellence and expertise of the CPA is that of post-election seminars. Several places have benefited from them and several will benefit during the year, not necessarily on the basis that I spoke about earlier, but in ways specific to the countries concerned. I believe that we have been helpful, in many cases, in shortening the learning curve of new Houses, so that they have not gone off the rails.

There is further scope to explore the use of the reservoir of parliamentary talent, and indeed former ministerial talent, which exists throughout the Commonwealth and the world, in conflict prevention and also possibly exploration and resolution. I do not

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know that we have the ability to act as arbiters, but we have the ability to go in as disinterested neutrals, hear both sides and suggest ideas that might be explored. The parliamentary experience that we have available to us is important in that. I have always worried that, when parliamentarians retire, we discard them from our reservoir of talent. They are there to be drawn on while they are healthy and available, which is often the case. We should not ignore that.

In our plenary conferences and regional conferences, we have aimed to choose topics so as to draw out issues that are referred to specifically in the Harare declaration, and to enable Members of so many different Parliaments coming together to share their experiences and knowledge and to devise and derive tactics that they might deploy in their home states to solve various problems that we identify under those circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Minister headed the delegation to the parliamentary conference in Canada in October. He experienced at first hand the enthusiastic exchange of information. I am delighted that he is able to lead the delegation to the 1995 conference in Sri Lanka, when we shall take further the issue of the way in which we develop democracy in our Commonwealth.

The Minister told us some of the ideas for the Heads of Government meeting in Auckland in November, and I shall tell him about two specific aspects that I believe need to be discussed, among many. The first is what I call the profile of the Commonwealth. The profile of the Commonwealth has been low. From time to time, it has been raised as a result of the temperature in South Africa or, before that, Rhodesia, there has been a fight and the media have been interested in us because there has been a fight. However, for the most part, because we tend to work together and not to fight, we do not excite media interest. That is a disadvantage. It is an advantage for our work, but a disadvantage in terms of obtaining public understanding.

In that context, I welcome the visit made to Brussels on 2 March 1995 by Chief Anyaoku, when he spoke to the European Parliament and met members of the European Commission. That was valuable, especially given the fact that the 35 Commonwealth countries make up slightly less than half of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in the Lomé convention. It is terribly important that there is greater awareness in the European Union of the nature of the Commonwealth.

We need to continue to increase the awareness of the Commonwealth in the world, of all that it stands for and of what it does. I mentioned the European Union. The United States of America is another part of the world that one might say is temporarily absent from the Commonwealth, or whatever one says, but in the USA there is not only an almost total lack of knowledge about the Commonwealth, but a lack of awareness that it even exists. Over the years in the House, I have had attached to me from time to time some of the young interns from universities. I always ask whether they have any awareness of the Commonwealth and, with one exception, the answer has been, "What is the Commonwealth?" It brings it home to me the fact that there is no knowledge.

Last summer, I was invited along with a CPA team to do a presentation at the National Conference of State Legislatures annual convention. That was a fascinating experience because the convention was very well attended. There is a ground swell of feeling in the United States at the moment that its system of checks and balances is so checked and balanced that nothing can be done; there is gridlock. All types of curious solutions are being suggested. My object, along with others, in being present was to demonstrate that there is another way.

Among the 200 state legislators who were present at that meeting, there was a total blankness and amazement that there was another way of running a Parliament or a legislature. They were fascinated, and want us to send another team to try to demonstrate at their next conference the way in which our system works.

I believe that that is good, in that those people can understand that there is a world outside; that there is another way of doing things. They find it mind-boggling that there should be no fewer than 120 legislatures around the world—almost three times as many as in the United States—working on that system, more or less, with variations and bits and bobs.

Further, I believe, given the spread of the Commonwealth to so many parts of the world, that that very large part of the world that I refer to as the Hispanic world should have a greater awareness of the nature of the Commonwealth. We just breathe on it through Belize and Guyana, but there should be far greater awareness, and we could avoid certain difficulties before they happen if there were that awareness. That is one big task that Heads of Government must tackle—to decide how to raise the profile of the Commonwealth without fighting to obtain reportage.

The second aspect that I wish Heads of Government to consider relates very much to fundamental political values that are referred to so often in various communiqués. The key to that lies in remarks made by Chief Anyaoku in his speech to the CPA plenary conference in Canada, when he floated the concept of linking democratic governance with active membership of the Commonwealth. His remarks were as follows:

> "I have had occasion to say in the past that military intervention in politics is a political aberration and a derogation from the democratic development of a country. I believe that as we progressively pursue the objectives of the Harare Declaration, the day will not be far away when representatives of military regimes will find no welcome in the councils of the Commonwealth."

That was a brave and sensible statement. I believe that it should be acted on.

The CPA already practises that concept, because among the criteria for active membership of our association is full democratic governance based upon universal suffrage. A member who slips from grace democratically is placed in abeyance. In CPA terms, that is fairly draconian, but it is our only sanction. It is not terminal, because a country is allowed back in the CPA as soon as that state of grace is restored.

One must be sensitive about what one advocates. I do not want to expel countries from the Commonwealth. Countries want to join it and the more countries we embrace, the better the chance we have of influencing change. By "we", I mean not the United Kingdom, but

Commonwealth members. There should be a penalty, however, against any group in a particular country that contemplates overthrowing or seeks to overthrow the democratically elected Government of that country. That group must consider the downsides to its action, and there should be some.

Each member country should know exactly where it stands and that the Commonwealth adopts a consistent approach. During the course of the year I passed through Fiji, to which my hon. Friend the Minister also referred. There is a distinct sense of injustice in that country, not because of the military coup and the subsequent peregrinations about how to restore a democratic Government, while recognising the various problems and interests, but because it is felt that Fiji was treated differently from other Commonwealth countries. People said to me, "Why were we expelled when Nigeria, the Gambia and Sierra Leone have not been expelled? Why were we treated differently?" They have a case.

There is a way of dealing with such a problem. It has been set out rather neatly in the communiqué from Islamabad, issued by senior officials, which addresses the question of non-payment of subscriptions to the Commonwealth secretariat. It made it clear that when a country had not paid for six years, it should be given special status. That special status would debar it from attending Heads of Government meetings. If that country had paid its subscriptions to the Commonwealth fund for technical co-operation—CFTC—it would be able to continue to draw on that reservoir of aid.

To apply that arrangement sideways, when a country slips from democratic grace through a coup or whatever, it should not be accorded the privilege—that is the right word—of attending a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. That country should be placed in a special relationship to the Commonwealth. Should it continue to pay its subscription to the CFTC and to the Commonwealth as a whole, it should be able to use that particular avenue to guarantee developmental aid and non-governmental organisation involvement. In that sense, the citizenry is not disadvantaged, but we should not give a platform to those who achieve their power by non-democratic means. I would like such an arrangement to be on the agenda at Auckland.

While I have been chairman of the international executive committee of the CPA, I have endeavoured to use my vacation time—I emphasise that, for obvious reasons—to visit as many CPA branches as possible. Whenever I have had an overseas commitment, I have been able to bolt on a number of rapid visits round the branches. I try to do a "Heineken" by getting to those branches, especially the smaller ones, which other chairmen and officers have been unable to reach. It is something of a rarity to travel to the smaller branches.

It is also nice to talk to people outside the Parliaments. It is a humbling experience, because their awareness of and regard for the Commonwealth is awe-inspiring. That is not only humbling, but unnerving, because in the United Kingdom I do not find that same awareness, respect, understanding, regard or even knowledge of the ideals of the Commonwealth.

That lack of knowledge brings me to the Commonwealth Institute. I should declare that, as a governor of it since 1989, I have a non-pecuniary interest in the institute. It took me a little time to understand what I was seeing. I acknowledge the downbeat nature of some of the remarks made last week and tonight about it. The lack of awareness, knowledge, understanding, respect or regard for the Commonwealth is a great reflection of the failure of the institute for many years. My hon. Friend the Minister has already referred to the falling numbers who attend the institute—800,000 people a year used to visit it; now that number is down to 250,000. That is a failure in itself, because the institute is failing to attract people.

I experienced trepidation when Lord Armstrong set out on a quinquennial review of the organisation. I was uplifted by his positive report. It was marvellous that the Commonwealth Institute was recognised for what it is. Along with the other governors, however, I was knocked down by the opinion of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and rather startled when funding was withdrawn. In fact, I was shattered. On reflection, and painful though it has been, I endorse what the Government have done to the Commonwealth Institute. I do not think that change could have been made without that kick. I do not believe that the Government have gone far enough yet.

One of Lord Armstrong's recommendations was that doing nothing was not an option. Throwing money at the institute had, palpably, achieved nothing. It was clear that there had to be a change in thought. I welcome the arrival of Lord Armstrong, as a vice-chairman, on the board of governors. That in itself is a powerful statement of confidence by him in the future of the institute.

I also pay tribute to the powerful chairmanship of David Thompson, who has guided the changes made during the past few months. I should like to reflect on the imaginative thinking of Stephen Cox, the director general of the institute. The fact that so many of our colleagues are aware of what is happening to the institute, when previously they were not even aware of it, is a reflection of his lobbying capabilities. There is nothing wrong with that.

The House must understand that feeling at the Commonwealth Institute is upbeat. It is excited by and committed to what it is trying to do. The developments are exciting. Now that the thought processes have been let loose, we are grateful to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for its further support as the institute moves into a period of transition. The timetable must be very tight if we are not to lose momentum as new developments are made. The Government need to move fast when the business plan is submitted, which will be well within the deadline.

There is a narrow window of opportunity for construction work to take place while the conference season is in abeyance. If we run over that and lose the conference season, the cash flow outcome will be different and dangerous. Incidentally, anyone seeking an excellent conference venue in London should know that the Commonwealth Institute's conference centre is right up among the leaders. It is very good indeed and extremely competitive.

I should like the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Treasury to match the lateral thinking that has been let loose within the Commonwealth Institute. There must be a team effort to take that to completion and there is a great penalty for doing nothing. If we get it wrong, if the thinking does not emerge and if there is

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collapse, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be left with a mess. That would be a rotten message to the Commonwealth and the world, as well as there being a continuing bill of £590,000 a year, because that is the sum that is required to do nothing to the building. That cannot be avoided, at least not without primary legislation. The pitching of the Commonwealth Institute into a new orbit is welcome, and traumatic, and it is becoming a value-for-money operation as well.

One message is not enough. Politics is also about perception and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office needs to project a continuing interest in the Commonwealth Institute. I am not saying that it needs to continue with the grant, but a rose by any other name smells as sweet and a subscription showing commitment would be helpful in terms of outside attitudes and perceptions. As I said, we must bear it in mind that doing nothing and allowing collapse would mean a subscription of £590,000 a year, and we are not necessarily looking for that.

The Department for Education has to play its part as well, because the institute is an educational establishment. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) spoke about its educational purpose, which is to create and develop awareness among the young as well as the old in this country, whatever their ethnic background, about the nature of the Commonwealth. The institute is the United Kingdom's only provider of education about the Commonwealth; the national curriculum includes a study of commonwealth. The educational activities are closely linked to the whole operation.

There is a Department for Education representative on the executive committee. I have been on that committee since 1989 and have listened to the DFE saying, "Yes, we agree." But as soon as there is a question of any money or help it says, "No, that is not our department, that is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We could not possibly get involved in that." As the institute has a positive educational role, I should like to see a positive educational input in financial terms from the DFE.

I support the institute's bid for a one-off grant to help it in its transition. It is a modest grant for the funding of phase 1 of its new education centre and I am certain that it would be a good investment. I should also like to see the DFE making a continuing subscription to the institute because of its palpable education mission.

There is great excitement in the institute about the new vision, which I call the Commonwealth vision—it is the vision of the Commonwealth that the institute portrays. It will rapidly become one of Britain's major draws for visitors. I want to see that happen and the time scale cannot be allowed to slip. It must be sustained and all the help that the Government can give in that direction will be enormously appreciated.

Our Commonwealth could not be invented if we started from scratch. It is a remarkable institution that others have tried to replicate, but so far they have failed. We might be able to help them in another way. The Commonwealth is international and multiracial and it works on personal relationships. Those have to be the best relationships for people, whether they are part of the Government or the governed. All Commonwealth countries need friends around the globe, and countries from outside the Commonwealth are seeking to engage our Commonwealth friends in friendship. The United Kingdom needs to look towards its friends in the Commonwealth so as to maintain that friendship, because we never know when we might need it. The Commonwealth is a forward-looking and pragmatic group of friends who have demonstrated their ability to work well together. We contribute a tremendous amount to the peoples of the world and we must continue to do that.

7.34 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The House is better informed about the Commonwealth Institute and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as a result of the speeches by the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd).

I share the anxiety of the hon. Member for Hereford about the fact that American interns had not heard the word "Commonwealth". The word is part of their own constitutional tradition, because the state of Virginia is properly described as the Commonwealth of Virginia. Other states are described in the same way. It is a pity that the interns did not understand that, at least for people in this country, a Commonwealth embraces much more than a single state.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley made an enthusiastic speech, and revealed the answer to a mystery that has troubled me for some time. When, in February and November, many of us are pallid and sickly, I could never understand why the hon. Gentleman had such extraordinary reserves of energy and sported such a well-developed tan. All can now be revealed. As treasurer of the CPA, the hon. Gentleman, in an orgy of self-denial, has taken himself to places that are far from the bosom of his family and the mother of Parliaments, so as to advance the interests of the Commonwealth and the CPA.

It seems to have done him no harm, and that may encourage others among the 536 CPA members in the House to take a more active role. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman's humorous response to these shafts at his expense does him great credit.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley made a number of significant points, dwelling to some extent upon the issue of the readmission of South Africa. When one considers the extent to which South Africa dominated Commonwealth affairs from 31 May 1961, when Mr. Verwoerd took it out, until 1 June 1994, when Mr. Mandela brought it back in, it is right to look at the Commonwealth to some extent through the eyes of South Africa as a rejoined member. That is especially relevant when one considers that Her Majesty the Queen is about to embark on what is justifiably described as an historic visit to South Africa, although it is her second visit.

What will South Africa be looking for as she returns to the Commonwealth? There is an obvious answer, and Mr. Mandela has been totally frank about it. The South African Government will be looking for the advantages of trade, commercial opportunity and aid. Some telling points have already been made in the debate about

the importance of aid and the extent to which, in the Commonwealth at large, there is, to put it as gently as I can, disappointment that some of the aspirations on aid have not been met by the Government to the extent that hon. Members in all parts of the House would have preferred.

South Africa will also be looking for the diplomatic influence that the Commonwealth can bring to bear on so much of world affairs, and for the opportunity of cultural exchange about which we have heard in the debate. South Africa is rightly described as sports-mad, and will be looking for the additional sporting opportunities that will now be available to it.

At Murrayfield stadium in November, as the South African rugby team was eviscerating my native and beloved Scotland, for a moment I disloyally wished that the Gleneagles agreement was still in force. A nation for which sport has always been extremely important is at last being allowed to take its rightful place in those sports in which it is truly world-class. So there we have it—the economic, diplomatic, cultural and sporting factors. Those are the benefits that South Africa undoubtedly looks for on its return to the Commonwealth.

I want to consider the interests of the Commonwealth's African members. One remembers the extent to which Africa was a central battleground, sometimes in literal terms, during the cold war. That war has come to an end. As a consequence, the super-powers' interest in Africa has waned. The Commonwealth is extremely important for its African members, because it allows them the opportunity for a collective voice.

For obvious reasons, the United Kingdom has rediscovered emphasis on the European Union, although the extent to which that will be carried through is something on which, at this stage at least, no final conclusion has been reached. The opening up of eastern Europe has necessarily focused people's attention away from Africa. The possibility of peace in the middle east has had a similar diversionary effect. The emphasis on the Pacific rim and the enormous economic opportunities that are available have also diverted attention. One could even say that the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement has drawn Canada, for so long a prominent member of the Commonwealth, into a relationship with the United States of America and Mexico.

For its African members, therefore, the Commonwealth has become yet more important as the eyes of the world have been diverted in other directions because of those political developments.

That collective voice has an influence on the UK—and through the UK on, I hope, the European Union—and on Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which are developed countries. Therefore, that opportunity for a collective voice persuades some countries that have never been members of the Commonwealth to show an interest in joining. They include Mozambique, Cameroon, Angola and Eritrea. One can say, without being patronising, that new democracies in Africa have much to learn from the Commonwealth and from the traditions of parliamentary government, about which we heard in the eloquent speech that was made earlier.

Some regimes are more in need than others of the lessons of parliamentary government. I thought that the hon. Member for Hereford embarked on an interesting debate when he said that the Commonwealth should not treat it as an entirely internal matter if a country that had conducted itself with proper parliamentary democratic traditions should change into a military rulership or something of that sort.

The Commonwealth's strength and credibility will be maintained only if it robustly condemns the replacement of properly constituted civilian rule by military rule, and large-scale human rights violations. Exclusion, special status and other such measures may be difficult to achieve—one can imagine all sorts of efforts being made at self-protection against sanctions of that sort.

As the hon. Gentleman said, however, such measures could do nothing but enhance the credibility of the Commonwealth as an institution embodying certain principles. Membership of the Commonwealth should be continued and allowed only if those principles remained at the heart of the institutions of each member.

I shall slightly divert from the comments of the hon. Gentleman for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). One might say that I take a slightly less visionary view of the Commonwealth. There must be some realism about what we are capable of achieving. I believe, as to some extent my remarks have underlined, that the Commonwealth's greatest contribution probably lies in the promotion of democracy and in the protection of human rights. That involves the extent to which the Harare declaration can be turned from a set of principles into practical proposals that are fully implemented.

Leaving aside the question of special status, suspension and other such measures, in a sense the Commonwealth's only effective sanctions are moral pressure and the ability to communicate, which a common language and common traditions undoubtedly confer. It would be idealistic, but wholly unrealistic, to expect that the Commonwealth as presently constituted could resolve the difficulties that exist between India and Pakistan.

One can argue with some force, however, that, if those difficulties were to reach their most acute state, and if, for example, an outbreak of hostilities took place—there have been, and no doubt will be, occasions when that seems likely—the Commonwealth would at least be available at the beginning to offer the opportunity for mediation, and to endeavour to persuade the adversaries to find a way of resolving their difficulty.

In relation in India and Pakistan, the Commonwealth would have a unique capability—no other institution would have that. I take a more realistic view than the hon. Gentleman—I believe that I am right to describe it like that—but I acknowledge that moral pressure, the capacity to communicate, and the existence of common traditions could be effective weapons in endeavouring to solve either hostilities or some substantial political disagreement that might arise between Commonwealth members.

One matter is a puzzle. I have frequently asked myself this question. What would have happened to the Commonwealth if apartheid had not been carried out in South Africa, and if that country had not left the

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

Commonwealth? What would have happened to all that moral indignation that characterised the meetings of Commonwealth Heads of State for such a long time? As with all speculations, it is impossible to give a realistic answer, but we are entitled to say that those meetings will no longer be as acrimonious as they were—we hope—and that the important task is to ensure that they become more fruitful and that the Commonwealth is more effective, now that it has solved its most significant internal political problem.

Last year, I had occasion to visit a cemetery near one of the battlefields in Europe. One only has to do that to realise just how strong the tradition is to which I have referred. The number of people from Commonwealth countries who died in western Europe fighting against Nazism is staggering to behold. To hon. Members who have not taken that opportunity, I recommend it as an extraordinary indication of the fact that the battle in Europe was fought by the Commonwealth as much as by the UK.

That common history and tradition clearly informs our attitudes today. It gives me hope in two respects. First, there is a practical thing we can do. Many of our discussions in the United Nations are given over to effective peacekeeping or peacemaking. We need not get into that debate this evening, but if ever an opportunity existed for the Commonwealth to take an active role, it surely lies in peacekeeping. We share those common traditions and a common language. Many senior officers have had common training as well.

I hope that, in the development of the Commonwealth's role, some consideration will be given to the extent to which Commonwealth battalions, or battalions from Commonwealth countries, may be allowed to take part more in relation to the likely increased requirements and obligations of the UN to provide peacekeeping forces.

I want to finish with the comment that has punctuated my speech, which is that it is in the promotion of democratic values and the recognition of human rights that the Commonwealth's relevance is to be found. A debate such as this gives us the opportunity to underline the possibility that a commitment of that sort would create.

7.50 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): In this week in which 51 flags fly in Parliament square representing the Commonwealth, I thank my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government for responding so promptly and with such enthusiasm to my request at business questions two weeks ago for a debate devoted entirely to the Commonwealth during the week following Commonwealth day, which was Monday 13 March. I wish the other representations that I make ceaselessly to the Government were taken up with such enthusiasm.

As the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has reminded us, this is the first Commonwealth debate held in the House since 1987. It is a disgrace that an institution that is so important to us in Britain has somehow managed to slip the attentions of all of us as legislators, and has not been the subject of a special debate. It has been subsumed in every other debate on foreign affairs. Perhaps the fact that we are having this debate is a manifestation of the remarkable and exciting resurgence of interest and activity in this great international institution in which Britain plays such an essential part.

If Dean Acheson had still been with us, he would be saying today that Britain, having lost an empire, has now found several roles. After all, there is hardly any major international organisation today, whether it be the United Nations, NATO, the G7 countries or the European Union, in which Britain does not sit at the top table, influencing important future policy. Of all the great institutions, the one in which we experience the greatest warmth and feel so much a part is the Commonwealth.

It is a great voluntary, charterless union of nations. It is the inheritor of the days of empire. It now numbers 51 nations, ruling over 1.5 billion people. South Africa and Pakistan have at last come back to join, as has Namibia, which was never a part of the British empire. Mozambique, Cameroon, Angola and Eritrea have shown an interest in joining, despite having no direct cultural links with our union in the past. An article in *The Independent on Sunday* recently said that Ireland was considering coming closer to the Commonwealth, and someone told me that Japan was showing some interest, if only as part of a joint venture.

During my early political lifetime of a generation and more, the question was often asked, "What is the use of the Commonwealth? It is no more than a talking shop. It does nothing and stands for very little." That is said no longer. The Commonwealth is now expanding and showing a new vitality. Why? I think that it is because its existing members, its former members and its aspiring members see a relevance and importance for it in the new world order.

In the past few years, the old order of the super-powers facing each other off in a cold war has disintegrated. Africa, once a focus of super-power interest, has become potentially weaker without strong allies. The old imperatives of communist power and compulsion have dissolved, and its vassal states are in danger of losing the guidance and control which for so long masqueraded as stability.

There is now a new freedom in the world. There are the beacons of democracy, free enterprise and the rule of law, but there is also a need for a new community which will foster and develop those beacons. There is a need for the newly independent nation states in the new order all over the world to attain new goals.

First, they need to maintain their independence by achieving economic self-reliance. That means joining a community with a common economic interest and opportunities for trade and industrial development. The Commonwealth could help to provide that with the investment of the major parties in countries such as South Africa and with the links that Britain has with the European Union.

Secondly, those countries need to be a part of a community with common security interests, in which their concerns can be expressed and their voices listened to in a way that has been no longer possible now that the old orders have dissolved.

Thirdly, there is a need to be closer to the beacons of democracy, free enterprise and the rule of law that are guiding those nations away from the rocks of totalitarianism in which those countries have engaged hitherto.

Fourthly, at a time of resurgent nationalism and racial conflict, the community that they join must be genuinely multiracial and concerned for human rights and civil liberties. The 1991 Harare declaration states that the Commonwealth would work, inter alia, for fundamental human rights, including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of race, colour, creed and political belief.

Fifthly, such nations will inevitably feel more comfortable in a community where there is a common language and a common history and culture. Although not all the aspirants to membership meet that requirement, broadly, the Commonwealth provides all that, and, in addition, the head of the Commonwealth—the Queen—embodies in her office and her person some of the best of the traditional features of our communal history.

Because of our shared history and traditions, particularly our regard for other races, there is a warmth of feeling among Commonwealth members that one does not feel so strongly in the other institutions in which Britain plays a part. The Commonwealth is and feels like a family—a family of nations.

As we have heard, over the past two weeks the United Kingdom branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, of which I currently have the privilege to be chairman, has been hosting one of its regular seminars for Commonwealth parliamentarians. As Briton eats, drinks and discusses with Kenyan, as Canadian discusses with Indian, New Zealander with Pakistani and Australian with South African and Falkland Islander, we all feel as if we are talking to our cousins—members of our family. It is quite extraordinary. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) for his kind remarks about the sort of work that the CPA does in that family environment.

Many organisations actively promote the Commonwealth ideal—they have been mentioned in several of the excellent speeches this evening. Since Parliaments are so central to the Commonwealth, it is not surprising that the CPA, with its international office as well as its United Kingdom branch here in Westminster, plays a such a prominent role. We represent the interests of over 10,000 Commonwealth parliamentarians in 123 legislatures in 47 Commonwealth countries.

The United Kingdom branch has 962 members, which includes 565 Members of Parliament—nearly all of us. I have approached some of our friends the Liberal Democrats, but they are committed to so many activities in the House, having to keep pace with the various Departments of State, that I accept that it may be a little difficult. However, I should be grateful if the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) would encourage one or two of his hon. Friends to consider joining. I do not accuse them for one moment of not being interested in the Commonwealth, but they are so few in number that they have to spread themselves thinly to cover all their commitments.

Three hundred and fifty members of our branch are former Members of Parliament. It is one of the largest branches of the CPA worldwide. Because of the high reputation enjoyed by our organisation, we had no fewer than 235 full applications from men of great distinction in the military and public services in answer to our advertisement for a new branch secretary to follow the redoubtable Captain Peter Cobb RN, who has served us for 15 years and, sadly, is having to retire.

Our model of parliamentary democracy—the Westminster model—has been exported worldwide. With the aid of workshops, seminars, visits and conferences, we continue to maintain that model and influence countries that seek to embrace it. In this context, I need not repeat many of the points made today, but we maintain that model in close liaison with the international CPA, which is chaired with great distinction by my predecessor at the United Kingdom branch of the CPA, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd). My hon. Friend's team of officials is led by the distinguished former Speaker of the Ontario Parliament, Mr. Arthur Donahoe QC.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I must put the record straight; the gentleman is the former Speaker of the Nova Scotia provincial assembly.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Our family is so wide, and we have so many cousins, that I sometimes forget what their allegiances are. Canada is and always has been a great part of the Commonwealth; whether Arthur Donahoe comes from Nova Scotia or Ontario is of little importance to us, although no doubt of great importance to him.

The metamorphosis from an empire with obligatory membership to a Commonwealth where membership is freely entered into, and even sought after, is astonishing. It is a sign of how long-established ties can evolve to become relevant even in a hugely changed world. However, to compliment the Commonwealth must not be the end of the story. We must continue to ensure that it remains relevant to its members and that we in Britain—in the mother of Parliaments—play a central role in developing and strengthening a very great institution. How can we do that?

First, we must develop our own economic links with Commonwealth countries. Our recent preoccupation with Europe may at times have blinded us to the fact that, whereas that institution commands less than half our total overseas earnings, the Commonwealth commands well over half. To the great markets of Asia, especially India, Hong Kong and Malaysia, we hope to add additional investment, and therefore earnings, in the great sleeping economic giant of South Africa.

In order to justify our involvement in these great economies, we have to be willing to stimulate the development of those countries with help in the form of training and aid and the development of their human resources, police, military establishments, public administration and their management skills, especially in the private sector. There is a tremendous reservoir for mutual economic development in the Commonwealth, and we must take these markets very seriously in the years ahead.

Secondly, we must keep bright the beacons of parliamentary democracy, the rule of the law and free enterprise capitalism—beacons lighted, let it be said, in

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

the Thatcher years. Without those beacons, the emerging nations may lose heart and revert—so delicate may some of the new states be—not to totalitarianism of the left but perhaps to totalitarianism of the right. With naked nationalism always comes racism, and that is the reverse of the multicultural, multi-ethnic society for which the Commonwealth stands. We must so resource ourselves that no invitation to advise, no request for guidance based on our wide experience and no invitation to visit or be visited, can be refused.

I know that the Government value the work of the CPA and will ensure that it remains properly financed. It is a very small price to pay for the great good it does to the very infrastructure of the international society. I remember especially the pleasurable help that many of us were able to give in the South African elections almost a year ago.

Thirdly, we must be aware that the new world order is throwing up enormous and potentially cataclysmic problems, and that the small emerging nations are especially vulnerable to the horrors of drugs, with which comes organised crime. Money laundering and economic crime is now becoming so widespread, with consequences so frightening, as to make our concerns about strengthening democracy seem almost as irrelevant as shifting the deck chairs on the sinking Titanic.

Three cases of serious fraud in the United Kingdom alone currently allege deficiencies exceeding by several hundred million pounds the total annual figure for burglaries in England and Wales. When one considers that most fraud is never investigated or its perpetrators caught, let alone brought to trial and convicted, one gains some idea of how grave the situation is in this country—and, of course, other countries.

Millions of pounds can be moved from one country to another in the twinkling of an eye without any police force being aware of how, where, why or when it happened until long after anything can be done about it. The smaller developing nation states of the Commonwealth are especially vulnerable to exploitation in this respect, and we must share our knowledge, intelligence and police with them.

The value of the worldwide cocaine trade alone has been put by those who know at several hundred thousand US dollars—as much as the entire gross national product of a country such as Britain. With such money, land is bought and developed, factories bought and constructed, and businesses, including banks, set up. They process the laundered money and invest it in legitimate businesses, where it grows and inevitably forms a significant part of national economies. Some Commonwealth countries are very vulnerable, and need all the help we can give them.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I agree that a number of small Commonwealth countries that have active offshore financial industries are vulnerable in the way that the hon. and learned Gentleman outlines. I am sure that he shares my pleasure in the fact that Britain gives help in the form of technical advice on banking regulation and policing, but does he share my concern that some of the offshore economies have that help paid for in part out of the Overseas Development Administration budget?

Does he believe that the relatively small sums of money involved—tens of thousands, or, at most, hundreds of thousands of pounds—could be met by increasingly slightly the fees for offshore businesses that register in states such as Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable intervention, but it would better be directed to my hon. Friend the Minister who will be summing up. I would rather not discuss fees and their scale, but the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We must pull out all the stops and share our knowledge, expertise and influence, and also the information that the Commonwealth countries, including the smaller ones, can provide for us.

Cocaine is not the only problem. Pakistan and India have enormous problems with heroin, as does Hong Kong. Cannabis is a problem in the Caribbean islands such as Jamaica. There are millions and millions of addicts, and billions and billions of dollars are being made by drug-trafficking operators looking for financial systems to infiltrate, Governments to buy and economies to undermine.

How long will pure, uncorrupted democracies last, even if we help to make them more representative and responsible by the influence that we can exert through our Commonwealth parliamentary associations? What will happen if we do not, as parliamentarians of the Commonwealth, take the lead in fighting the terrifying evils of drug and financial crime by genuine international co-operation?

The members of the Commonwealth can work together in an effort to wipe out drug crops by providing farmers in Commonwealth countries and others with alternative livelihoods. We can act by encouraging stronger laws and stronger policing to trace, seize and freeze the assets of drug traffickers. We should help to ensure that Commonwealth countries sign the United Nations conventions against drugs, implement the 40 recommendations of the G7 summit financial action task force, which set out best practice, and implement also the 21 recommendations of the Caribbean financial action task force under the chairmanship of Trinidad and Tobago.

Many activities are taking place. We must use all the force and persuasion we can within the Commonwealth to try to ensure that the maximum advantage is taken of the work that is being done. We hope that, in future, our CPA seminars will target world problems of the sort to which I have drawn attention, rather than holding general seminars on general matters of interest. If we home in on some of the problems, we may be able to achieve more mileage in dealing with needs and opportunities.

Fourthly, I so agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford that we must build up the knowledge and understanding of our children about the Commonwealth. They must learn in our schools what the Commonwealth stands for, and why it is such an important part of world society. They must understand why it is something in which we in Britain can take so much pride. In a sense, it is almost a national organisation. Britain has been so

much at the centre of the Commonwealth. We continue to play our part, but no longer as the head of the empire. We are sillt one of the important players.

We have all rightly sung the praises of the Commonwealth this evening. Its vital role in the world—I hope that this encapsulates my theme—must not be underrated. It cannot be denied that the Commonwealth is a great force for good in the world, and a vital part of Britain's inheritance.

8.12 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): I shall resist the temptation to join battle with the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) on the contribution made to the well-being of the 1.5 billion people of the Commonwealth—the vast majority of them extremely poor—by free-market capitalism, let alone by the Thatcher years.

I add my congratulations to those already directed to the Leader of the House for organising the debate. It has been a fine debate and we must hope that seven years will not pass until the next one. Such debates should be annual parliamentary events. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber who have made that point, or similar points, will be listened to by the Leader of the House.

Britain can be justifiably proud of the way in which it has made the adjustment from being primus inter pares as the head of an empire to being a member of the family of the Commonwealth. Having lost our empire, we have, as the hon. and learned Member for Burton said, found not one but many roles in the world.

We have a Commonwealth upon which the sun never sets. I was once upbraided by an old man in a poor village in central Africa. He said, with what I thought was great prescience, that the sun never set on the British empire because God would never trust an Englishman in the dark. I do not know quite what he meant. It is true, however, that we have adjusted to a new role with some distinction.

It is true also that the Commonwealth is held in much greater affection elsewhere within it than it is here in the United Kingdom. That is one of the reasons why we should have an annual debate. It is also one of the reasons why, as has been said, we need to be more innovative and more generous in our support for institutions such as the Commonwealth Institute. Generally, we should seek to put more power at the elbow of the Commonwealth.

Bearing in mind the good nature of the debate, I say with some trepidation that it has been slightly too self-congratulatory and has pictured the Commonwealth in just a little too rosy a way. I declare an interest because I have recently returned from a visit to Pakistan over the new year holiday as a guest of the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It is a country with which I have close links. I hold its highest civil award, and I take a close interest in its affairs, as do other hon. Members.

Having just returned to the Commonwealth fold, Pakistan is extremely sore about the apparent lack of interest of the Commonwealth, and of the United Kingdom as a leading player within it, in the dreadful problems that are afflicting its fragile democratic Government. The burden of my remarks will be on that subject, on relations between Pakistan and India and on ways in which the Commonwealth could play a constructive part in resolving some of the problems.

During an interview with the *International Herald Tribune*, Benazir Bhutto said:

> "Pakistan today is the frontline state against the forces of extremism and fanaticism. It is a wall of modernity against all those values that undermine global stability. Pakistan has a constitutional and democratic government. It ought to be strengthened and supported".

I agree with her. Pakistan is in the front line. It is under tremendous onslaught from the forces of darkness. It is incumbent upon the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth to do everything possible to buttress the democratic system in Pakistan and to help it to deal with the many problems that it faces.

The problem of drugs has been alluded to by several hon. Members. No other country in the world, with the possible exception of Colombia, is more afflicted by the big-time, big-business, organised drug trade. There are drug barons who are vastly wealthy with huge, feudal armies at their disposal. They are extremely heavily armed. That is something to which I shall return.

Pakistan is afflicted by the awful sectarian disaster of Karachi. In 1994, more than 1,000 people died as a result of political violence. In the first three months of this year, many hundreds more have perished, including, over the past week or so, two diplomats from the American mission in Karachi, with 15 people dying in a mosque here and a dozen at a mosque there. People are being gunned down from passing cars and up alleyways in political violence that is showing every sign of spiralling out of control.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan was right to say in Karachi the other day that to some extent violence is being encouraged and, in part, financed by foreign powers. Iran is involved, for sure, in the new Shi'ite-Sunni conflict in Karachi. Involved also is India, which has recently had its consulate closed in Karachi because of the role being played by Indian secret intelligence agents in fomenting communal violence.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan was right to say that the west had flooded Pakistan and Afghanistan with high-tech armaments for the holy warriors, the mujaheddin, who were fighting the holy war against communism and the Soviet Union, and that has led to a situation where, in Karachi alone, there are 100,000 illegally held automatic arms capable of absolute devastation in the crowded marketplaces and mosques in which they are increasingly being used.

There are millions of weapons in the wrong hands in Pakistan and they are now spreading throughout the country. They are in the hands of those noble warriors who used to be lauded by Sandy Gall and others on "News at Ten" when they were doing the bidding—*[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. and learned Member for Burton has returned to the Chamber. They were fighting for a world safe for free-market capitalism, in which it could flourish. However, those people are now using their weapons to undermine the very existence of the democratic state in Pakistan. They are murdering people on a daily basis and they pose an armed threat to the existence of democracy itself.

[Mr. George Galloway]

Then there is Kashmir. It just will not do for Britain to walk away from the question of Kashmir. It will not do for the Commonwealth to say, "It has nothing to do with us." Kashmir is a legacy of the end of empire. It is a legacy of the failure of the British Government at the time—yes, a Labour Government—properly to manage the partition and all that flowed from it.

A reign of terror exists in Kashmir. Six hundred and fifty thousand Indian soldiers occupy illegally, in breach of United Nations resolutions, the tiny state of Jammu and Kashmir. Atrocities of a horrifying kind are an everyday occurrence there. That is happening in the Commonwealth—a point that has not been touched upon in the debate so far, except tangentially.

On my last visit there, I interviewed women who had been raped by Indian security forces. A woman of 18 had been raped by more than 100 soldiers in a little village on the outskirts of Srinigar. I took photographs of men whose feet had been severed by the swords of Indian soldiers in the Commonwealth, in the past 12 months, during this reign of terror in the valley of Jammu and Kashmir.

Atrocities are taking place and we are doing nothing about them. I must tell the Minister that, although he battled bravely to try to recover some of the damage done, the recent visit to India and Pakistan by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was a disaster for the people of Kashmir and Pakistan. His very definite tilt in respect of British policy, moving it from one of sitting on the fence to one of climbing down on the Indian side of the fence because of the free-market capitalist opportunities which are opening up in the new post-Soviet India, was an absolute disgrace.

The Secretary of State said that the UN resolutions on Kashmir were increasingly irrelevant. Leaving aside the issue of when a UN resolution becomes irrelevant and of sending the message to aggressors that, if they can hang on to their spoils long enough, the UN resolutions condemning them will one day become irrelevant, the facts are that we have an obligation as the head of the Commonwealth and as the former imperial power to try to control the tragedy and disaster in Kashmir.

I shall explain how we can do that. As the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, we are in a unique position. The Commonwealth is in a unique position—because it contains both India and Pakistan and, therefore, Kashmir—to kick-start some kind of negotiating process which long ago ran into the snow in Kashmir. It is no use the Secretary of State saying that the Simla agreement somehow supersedes the UN resolutions. The Simla agreement calls on the matter to be resolved between India and Pakistan, but India will not even discuss the question of Kashmir with Pakistan, claiming that it is an internal matter, when all hon. Members know that it is not.

We are in a position to say, "Well, all right. If it is some kind of internal matter, let's deal with it in-house, inside the Commonwealth family." We can set up an eminent persons group of the kind that worked so well and so effectively over the South African problem. There are plenty of distinguished, superannuated statespeople at large in the Commonwealth family, such as Bob Hawke of Australia and Kaunda of Zambia. Even the heroine of the hon. and learned Member for Burton, Lady Thatcher, could play a role in this, with her stature in many parts of the world. I am not sure whether it is deserved, but it exists. It is possible to put together an eminent persons group which could play the kind of shuttlecock role between India and Pakistan that could kick-start the process.

I must tell the Minister that the cost of not doing that is not only the continuation of the disaster of massive repression in Kashmir and the inevitable corruption of democratic life and civil liberties and the rule of law in India which that represents. Kashmir is a dagger at the heart of the Government of Pakistan and of democracy itself in Pakistan. The banner that is flown by the fanatics of the Islamic right in Pakistan is that democracy will never resolve the question of Kashmir: only a Pakistan bristling, armed to the teeth and, if possible, nuclear armed, will ever force India to disgorge that which it holds illegally in the form of Jammu and Kashmir.

That is a running sore; ultimately, it will engulf democratic politics in Pakistan unless the issue is grasped by somebody. I argue that it would be better that that somebody was the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom than anybody else, because we are so uniquely placed to fill that role.

The Government of Pakistan deserve the support of all people of good will in this House. The Prime Minister bravely confronted the zealots in the past few weeks over the outrage of the sentencing to death of two Christians for painting slogans on a mosque. The Prime Minister of Pakistan immediately declared that that was completely unacceptable, that she was shocked and horrified by it, and that the verdict must not stand. The higher court in Pakistan, having considered the matter, quashed the sentences.

I hope that the Minister will believe me when I say that great anger and rage was caused among the extremists in Pakistan by the stand that she took, but she took it. They feel great anger when she takes a stand against the drug barons, too, but there is also great anger and frustration in Pakistan when democratic politics yields nothing in the context of the Indian occupation of Jammu and Kashmir.

For several reasons, therefore—for India's sake, for Kashmir's sake and for the sake of Pakistan and of the Commonwealth—we should do something about that situation before it is too late. I hope that the Minister has heard what I have said.

8.29 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I speak as someone who today celebrates his 19th anniversary in this place when I say that one of the excellent benefits of attending a debate such as this in the House of Commons is that if one listens carefully to the thoughtful and sometimes passionate speeches, one can learn a great deal that helps to advance one's own thinking. I hope that it will not be Back Benchers alone who derive a useful few hours of adult education from the debate, but that those on the Front Benches, especially Ministers, and their civil service advisers, will derive some benefit too. They would do well to listen to some of the knowledgeable and occasionally

passionate speeches about different aspects of the Commonwealth, such as many of those that have already been made.

I do not have much that is original or even passionate to say, but I want to add my brief contribution because I too attach great importance to the Commonwealth as an institution. I must declare a sentimental interest: I was born in Simla, nearly 52 years ago, at the tail end of the British Raj, and I have watched from afar as India has developed from being the jewel in the crown of the British empire to being a leading and vital member of the Commonwealth of nations, on a par with any other of its members.

I was especially interested, therefore, in what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) said about the tragic and needless continuing conflict in Kashmir and Jammu. I shall say a few amateur words of my own about that later.

I could not possibly match the encomium of the Commonwealth as a whole delivered by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who also spoke powerfully and interestingly about combating international crime, especially drug-related crime. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues in the Government will do everything possible to follow up my hon. and learned Friend's advice, because it seemed to me that he spoke with great knowledge of the law and order issues involved.

From what little I know about such matters, I realise that Britain has a great deal of expertise in this matter, which could be applied to such problems. For example, MI6 seems to be able to spend a large sum on its new headquarters just across the river, and the press tell us that it is seeking a new role in the world now that the Soviet Union has collapsed. No doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will not be able to speak about this publicly, but one new role for MI6 might be playing a constructive part in what must be global efforts to counter the international drugs trade and all the racketeering that goes with it.

I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) a strong interest in ensuring that the Commonwealth Institute survives, transforms itself and prospers in its new public-private partnership, especially as by 1999 it is scheduled to be devoid of all direct public support. Like my hon. Friend, I have seen the exhibitions mounted by the admirable Stephen Cox and his colleagues showing what they intend to do with the site. I too have visited the site and seen its great potential, which remains despite the fact that, alas, the building was constructed at a time and in a way that makes it fiendishly expensive and difficult to maintain.

I agree with my hon. Friend that there should be a contribution towards that necessary transitional expense by my former Department, the Department for Education, which obviously has a clear interest in ensuring that the Commonwealth Institute performs its tasks well in future. I hope that there will be no needless and sterile talk of fighting over departmental boundaries, because it is both in the Government's interest and in the national interest that the institute should make the transition.

One has only to ask oneself the rhetorical question: how would the French handle the situation if a question arose concerning a comparable institution with a potentially important role to play in supporting and popularising the francophone community? They would grasp the opportunity with both hands, and they would be right to do so. This country should not be afraid to emulate such an example.

I have said to the managerial people at the Commonwealth Institute that in the fund-raising efforts that I believe that they are to make, they should make a serious effort to look for "high net worth" individuals, of which there are many more now than there were in 1979, courtesy of the policies of the Government as well as other factors. Those people should be sought not only within Britain but throughout some of the more dynamic and prosperous Commonwealth countries. The institute should approach them and appeal to their sense of altruism and their wider sense of civic responsibility, so as to secure an injection of private money into what is obviously a worthwhile institution.

I have a couple of questions to ask the Minister concerning the Commonwealth in general. If he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he may be able to say something about each of them in his winding-up speech. I agree with all the hon. Members who have either explicitly or implicitly underlined the fact that the Commonwealth, rather like the Pope, does not have all that many divisions directly in its own name. It has a history and considerable moral authority in all parts of the world, and it should use those to exert a constructive influence, especially with regard to the problems that have led to intractable difficulties such as those in Kashmir described by the hon. Member for Hillhead.

The first question that I should like to ask my hon. Friend, and about which I should like to hear a little more, is: what precisely have the Government sought to do within the context of our Commonwealth role to assist in conflict resolution in Kashmir, the example that the hon. Gentleman gave? Just as important, in my view, is the example of the internal difficulties in Sri Lanka.

From time to time, I talk to sixth formers in my constituency, as I suspect that other hon. Members do. At a recent meeting, I exchanged views with lower sixth form girls at Wallington high school for girls in my constituency, and I was struck by the fact that three or four questions were asked from different quarters about the situation in Sri Lanka. I was asked why the Government appear relatively impotent in taking effective action to influence that situation, and those young idealistic girls specifically asked me whether we could not do more through the Commonwealth connection to help to resolve the dispute.

That is especially relevant because, as the House will know, the situation is not, strictly speaking, an internal matter for Sri Lanka, as the Indian Government have played a considerable role in supporting the Tamils. The House would like to know that the Government take issues such as Kashmir and Sri Lanka seriously and are using their best endeavours to exploit all the opportunities and all the contacts and networks of the Commonwealth to bring about a peaceful solution to those tragic problems.

My second question is about another problem that has concerned me for years—the non-proliferation regime. Of course, that has a connection with the India-Pakistan dispute. A review of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is to take place shortly. I

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understand that Her Majesty's Government strongly support the indefinite renewal of the treaty, and that is all to the good; but it is important for us to give an earnest of our intentions. We must subscribe to the spirit of the comprehensive test ban treaty, which in the minds of many is linked with progress on non-proliferation. We must set an example to "threshold" states—and even states such as India and Pakistan, which are way beyond the threshold. Those states have demonstrated their capacity to cause nuclear explosions, and, for all I know, have the ballistic capacity to deliver nuclear warheads. We cannot assume that, just because the cold war is over, the threat to the people and environment of the globe has diminished.

If anything, the dangers are greater rather than less in the new multi-polar, fragile world, because the condominium between the United States and what was the Soviet Union no longer exists. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say something reassuring—something that would reassure my young constituents who want to believe that they can grow up and, in their adult lives, make their contribution in a time of peace and prosperity.

I am glad that the Commonwealth now provides such a wide and rapidly growing range of trade and investment opportunities, not only for this country but for the countries in which we invest and with which we trade. Over dinner the other day, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, paying one of his rare visits to this country—obviously, he performs his duties abroad on behalf of Britain, and rightly so—reminded me that Britain is now the second largest exporter to India.

Everyone thinks of China as the world's monster market, but we should consider India's natural resources, as I have done from afar. We should consider its human capital—its skills, its links with Britain, its academic achievements, its scientific expertise and the commitment to free markets that has followed from the new Indian policy. All those assets bring great benefits not only to this country, in terms of trade and payments, but to the Indian people.

They desperately need the lubrication of growing prosperity to counter extremism, develop their country and, hopefully, limit the dangers of fundamentalism—Hindu fundamentalism or any other kind. Limiting fundamentalism will not only lessen the risk to the future of India—India's very existence is a miracle, given the problems of the Punjab and so forth—but help, at least at the margin, to reduce the dangers of a polarised attitude to critical questions such as the future of Kashmir, on which I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Hillhead.

I bring no special expertise to the debate, but I have enormous sympathy with our friends and fellow family members in the Commonwealth nations. I believe that the Commonwealth has a great future—indeed, probably a greater future in the 21st century than it had in the second half of the 20th. It is up to us, as the mother nation of a great institution, to help to take it forward on a basis of equality, mutual respect and adherence to altruistic policies of the sort that I have described. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to reassure us all.

8.43 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Let me begin by paying tribute to Sir Charles Kerruish, president of the Tynwald, who will shortly celebrate 50 years of continuous service to his island legislature. He is the father of that House, and almost indisputably the father of Commonwealth parliamentarians. When I met him and other fellow parliamentarians on the Isle of Man on Commonwealth day, I realised the importance that members of both large and small jurisdictions attach to the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It was with great pride that the Tynwald Members commemorated their island's membership of the Commonwealth. As others have pointed out, the United Kingdom is probably unique in not celebrating Commonwealth day to any great extent, or at least to the extent that it is celebrated in other parts of the world.

On that day, I was able to renew my acquaintance with friends from the Isle of Man Parliament whom I had met at the CPA conference in October. It was a privilege to be part of the United Kingdom delegation on that occasion, and I shall always remember the re-entry of the South African delegation to the plenary session, which was very moving. I reflected, however, on the fact that there is still one great void in the membership of the Commonwealth. I refer to the Republic of Ireland.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) mentioned Ireland, but he may have overlooked the fact that Ireland was a member of the Commonwealth until 1949. I think that it is time that it returned to the Commonwealth. About a year ago, in parliamentary questions, I suggested that the Government—along with Heads of other Commonwealth Governments—should take the initiative in extending an invitation to the Irish Republic to rejoin the Commonwealth. I was disappointed to receive the reply, "Invitations are not extended; people or countries apply." I thought that a rather disingenuous and churlish approach; strictly speaking, that may be the position, but surely indications should be given that the time is now appropriate for Ireland to rejoin.

Irish men and women live in every corner of the Commonwealth, and they—or their children and grandchildren—play a full part in the Administrations and lives of Commonwealth countries. An Irish team would enrich the Commonwealth Games, for instance. Let me also remind those in the Irish Republic—if they read our deliberations—that it is no longer the "British" Commonwealth but the Commonwealth. That may reassure those who are beginning to contemplate Ireland's return.

In his discussions with Lloyd George, Eamon De Valera tried to persuade him that an Irish Republic could exist in what was then the British Empire, and by what he termed "external association". The head of that external association, he argued, could be George V, but Ireland would participate as a republic. Lloyd George threw up his hands in horror, and said that it could not possibly be done: it was alien to the whole concept of the British Empire. It was a great lost opportunity.

In that regard, De Valera was ahead of his time: exactly the same formula was used by Pandit Nehru in 1949. India remained in the British Commonwealth as a republic and, indeed, the majority of states in the Commonwealth are now republics. It is a great irony that, as India joined the Commonwealth with republic status, Ireland was taken out by the Costello Government. As things have bedded down, as there is a majority of republics in the Commonwealth and as the Commonwealth is demonstrably a powerful player for good in the world, it is time that Ireland came home to this family of nations.

Ireland has a proud record of working in international organisations, brokering peace in the world and contributing to peacekeeping forces. Its readmission would complement the work of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and many other countries.

It is significant that the External Affairs Minister of the Irish Free State, Kevin O'Higgins, played an important part in the discussions that led up to the Statute of Westminster Act 1931. Unfortunately, he was assassinated before enactment. I mention him because the Under-Secretary gave a limited history of the development of the Commonwealth in his opening remarks. He overlooked that major and important constitutional milestone, the Statute of Westminster, which settled our relationships with the Commonwealth as it then existed—Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the Irish Free State. Broadly, it stated that those were countries of equal status with the United Kingdom. It has been a significant statute. It has given good service to the evolution of the Commonwealth.

I have, however, sought to make the point in the House for some time that the Statute of Westminster is now old. It needs to be reviewed with a view to the development of a new constitutional relationship between those countries in the Commonwealth mainly but perhaps inappropriately described as the "old Commonwealth" and those which still have as head of state Her Majesty the Queen. I raise the point because, sooner or later, we—when I say "we" I mean the 16 countries in the Commonwealth of which Her Majesty the Queen is head of state—will have to deal with the matter. It is better to do so now than at a moment of constitutional crisis.

I shall explain why I believe that we need to re-examine the Statute of Westminster. Three constitutional issues could arise which would create major problems for the Governments and Parliaments of the countries of the Commonwealth of which the Queen is head of state. One is the issue of the primogeniture rule, under which the heir to the throne is the first-born son of the monarch.

It is conceivable that in 20 years' time or more the first child of the heir to the throne or the monarch will be a girl and the second child a boy. Under our existing rules, the boy would become the heir to the throne. It is my understanding that this would create dissatisfaction, if not be unacceptable, to some of the countries in the Commonwealth that share the United Kingdom monarchy. That is one scenario that could create an immediate conflict. I venture to suggest that, if Canada and New Zealand are still monarchies at that time, they will find it unacceptable that a girl who was the first-born of the monarch or the heir to the throne should be passed over in favour of the second child, who was a boy.

Secondly, it is conceivable that there could be a need for regency legislation at some stage—for example, if the monarch or the heir to the throne was incapacitated. That would require simultaneous and parallel legislation in 16 independent Commonwealth legislatures.

The third scenario is the divorce of the Prince of Wales. Legislation is not necessary for a divorce, but special legislation would be needed as a consequence of that divorce. If there was a subsequent marriage and if there was issue from that marriage, what position would those children have in the line to the throne?

Those three scenarios could arise and they need to be considered now, before there is a crisis. The first test of the Statute of Westminster Act was in 1936 when Edward VIII wished to abdicate. The Prime Ministers of Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa used their powers under the Statute of Westminster to ask the United Kingdom Parliament to legislate for the abdication. It would now be impossible for the Canadian Prime Minister or Parliament to ask the United Kingdom Parliament to enact the necessary legislation consequent on any of the three scenarios to which I referred; they are constitutionally unable to do so. In addition, it is arguable that they would have to alter their constitutions in any of those scenarios; it would not be simple for them to do so.

The Parliaments and Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and St. Kitts and Nevis have equal status in relation to the monarchy. In some parliamentary questions, I asked the Foreign Secretary about the mechanism by which Her Majesty the Queen can be given collective advice by the Prime Ministers of the 16 countries of which she is head of state. He said that there was not one. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, constitutionally the Prime Minister is the principal adviser to the Queen in the United Kingdom.

I assume that the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth is the adviser to the Queen as head of the Commonwealth, but there is a gap. There is no collective mechanism by which the Prime Ministers of the 16 countries of which the Queen is head of state can give collective advice. Her Majesty's Government must deal with that point. They must take the initiative with Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the other countries to hold a conference so that those joint issues can be raised. There should be some mechanism whereby collective advice can be tendered to Her Majesty the Queen.

I wish to refer again to Ireland in the context of the scenarios that I have outlined. In 1936 the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa agreed that Westminster should enact His Majesty's Declaration of Abdication Act 1936 on their behalf, but the Prime Minister of one dominion declined. The Prime Minister of the Irish Free State, Eamon de Valera, said, "Hang on a moment. Westminster is not going to enact the head of state legislation for me." He used that occasion to abolish the post of governor general by legislation in the Dail and created the post of president. Effectively, and

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legitimately from his point of view, he moved the Irish Free State one more ratchet towards his objective of a republic.

I have to issue a warning. If the points that I have raised regarding the 16 monarchies and the collective advice is ignored, and if any of the three scenarios to which I have referred occur, there will be trouble in the Commonwealth. For instance, Prime Minister Keating may take a leaf out of the book of Eamon de Valera. He may say, "I am going to go to the House of Representatives in Canberra and legislate for our own head of state." That could create many problems and ricochet throughout the Commonwealth because it would have all been done hastily, rather than in a considered way. We need to work out some mechanism whereby the countries of which Her Majesty the Queen is head of state reach a collective agreement about monarchical succession, so long as that system endures.

One other point occurs to me, which is relatively minor but which flows from my previous point. I asked questions some time ago on what contribution the 15 other states of which the Queen is head of state make to the civil list and to the funding of the monarchy. I was told that they fund the monarchy's functions in their own jurisdictions, which I understand. When the Queen visits one of those countries, the Government of that country host her visit. I think that as a principle it would be good if, on a population basis, the other 15 states made some contribution to the running of Buckingham palace and the costs of the head of state.

Such a principle is especially significant in the debate about a new royal yacht. Apart from once a year, when Her Majesty the Queen visits the islands in Scotland, the royal yacht is primarily a symbol of her Commonwealth function, and she uses it when she visits countries around the world. The cost of the royal yacht should be shared, certainly between the 16 states of which she is head. Arguably, other countries may want to contribute too.

How about having a crew drawn from Commonwealth navies? I should have thought that that would be extremely attractive to the navies of the Commonwealth, especially those of countries of which the Queen is head of state. Since our armed forces are stretched, we should also develop further another practice that occurred in the past. Some of the ceremonial duties at Buckingham palace should be carried out more frequently by representatives of the armed forces of the other 15 states to which I referred.

I intervened on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and said that I would mention the empire. The vast majority of Commonwealth countries are fully independent, but some 14 jurisdictions, containing a total of almost 200,000 people, are not independent but are colonies. They are headed by a governor who is appointed by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. We have an obligation to those 200,000 people to ensure that they are subject to good governance. Here at Westminster, we need to find a way in which we can monitor, probe, scrutinise and examine the administration and stewardship of the governors who are appointed by the Foreign Secretary.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the issue of the colonies was much more important in this place, and I venture to suggest that, as a result, the colonies were more closely scrutinised. As the big colonies have gained independence, there is a real danger of our doing a disservice to the 14 other jurisdictions and forgetting about them. I have excluded Hong Kong because, regrettably, it will soon be leaving the Commonwealth. In those 14, apart from Hong Kong, there are about 200,000 people.

Those jurisdictions are peppered around the globe and we should try hard to provide some machinery whereby we can study their Administrations and provide them with some representation. We ought to consider what happens in the United States, where comparable jurisdictions can send non-voting Congressmen to Washington. They have the opportunity to speak in debates and to put questions exclusively on matters that relate to their jurisdictions.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman is canvassing a novel idea. Would not a simple solution to the dilemma be to encourage the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs to establish a Sub-Committee, that could have some oversight over our remaining dependencies?

Mr. Mackinlay: I thought about that. My suggestion is not instead of that, but complementary to the concept of the Select Committee having a scrutiny role. We are talking about a group of people who are dispersed around the globe and it is impossible for the Select Committee to ensure the scrutiny to which I referred, or to ensure that messages are brought to this place about any unhappiness, criticism or need for remedies that might exist in those colonies.

Some limited form of representation at Westminster for those jurisdictions is required. What on earth could be wrong with that? I have felt somewhat frustrated. If the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and I were to take an interest in those jurisdictions, we would have no way of getting there. Great distances and enormous costs are involved. We might be included on delegations, but they are not the best vehicles for scrutiny.

I take an interest in Gibraltar. The first time that I went there was at the invitation of the Government of Gibraltar, who had noticed that I had taken an interest. It would have been much better if I had been able to go without an invitation. When one goes as a guest, there is always the potential for embarrassment. We need to provide some opportunities for spot visits—

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): During the recess.

Mr. Mackinlay: My hon. Friend has a point.

Today I had lunch with a representative of the Australian Northern Territory. The Australian state Parliaments—let alone the federal Parliament—have a breathtaking travel budget. I am not advocating that, but there should be some opportunity for representatives of this place to visit the remaining colonies for which we have some responsibility without notice so that proper scrutiny can take place.

Like other hon. Members, I have painted a broad canvas of interests with regard to the Commonwealth. I was recently in the company of one of my hon. Friends, discussing my thesis that Ireland should return

to the Commonwealth. He said, "Why on earth would it want to do that?" I was shocked by that response and explained why I thought it would be to the mutual benefit of the Commonwealth and Ireland if it re-entered.

He expressed the view that the Commonwealth was unimportant, which deeply depressed me, because I acknowledge that it has been a force for good in the world—albeit a very silent force. It has done a great deal in brokering some ceasefires and has intervened where there has been bloodshed. Some hon. Members have referred to its failures, but it is important for us to acknowledge that it has also played a great part in trying to achieve some stability. In some cases, it is a ratchet against military takeovers.

Through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and other agencies, we are able to aid and assist the fragile and emerging democracies in the Commonwealth. I should like the CPA to develop as a limited parliamentary arm that supervises the work of the Commonwealth secretariat and other agencies.

At the conference that I attended with the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) and my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley in October, I welcomed the innovation whereby the Secretary-General agreed to present a report to the assembly and then answer questions. I believe that the hon. Member for Hereford had a hand in that welcome development of parliamentary scrutiny of the important Commonwealth secretariat's work.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth has been a fervent supporter of that development. I take no credit for it but hand the credit to him, because he has always gone out of his way to ensure that he is available to exchange views with us.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying the position. That welcome development should be continued in subsequent conferences, because the Commonwealth agencies and secretariat are of considerable interest. It would be educative to a number of Commonwealth parliamentarians and show the democratic principles behind the Commonwealth if what Chief Anyaoku did in Canada were continued at future conferences.

I add my name to the list of hon. Members who proclaim the Commonwealth as a proud and valued institution, and I wish it well in its further development.

9.11 pm

Mr. Baldry: This has been a timely and welcome debate. The House has been broadly united in agreement about the Commonwealth's value, potential and achievements. The underlying feeling that emerged in the debate was that more needs to be done to bring home, both here and overseas, what the Commonwealth stands for and its potential. That was the broad canvas against which today's debate took place.

A number of specific points were raised, some important and some of detail, and I shall try to respond to them, particularly to those on which I was specifically asked to respond. However, I do not want those points to detract from the strong overall agreement in the House.

By and large, I agreed with what the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) had to say on this subject. There is no daylight between the Government and the Opposition on the subject of Hong Kong, and I am sure that the House of Commons is at one in its position on Hong Kong, which is a great strength and support to the governor and people of Hong Kong, as we approach 1997 and the period of change.

The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised, however, that I fundamentally disagreed with him about our aid budget and the European development fund. We have every reason to be proud of our aid budget, which is the sixth largest in the world at a time when many countries, such as the United States and Canada, are reducing their aid budgets. I am sure that we shall debate that subject on many future occasions—I look forward to ODA questions on Monday—so I shall not dwell on the subject now.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) rightly discussed the contribution that the Commonwealth can make towards tackling drugs and international crime. I fully support him on that. We already do a considerable amount, and a large chunk of our aid budget is devoted to supporting Commonwealth countries such as Pakistan in tackling its drugs problem. As I said in my opening comments, one of the subjects that we shall consider at the Commonwealth Heads of Government conference in Auckland is what more the Commonwealth can do to tackle drugs, money laundering and international crime.

There are already many excellent examples of co-operation. As recently as a few months ago, for example, the Government of Anguilla, working with others, achieved a first-class operation in setting up what was, in effect, a sham bank which sucked in large quantities of laundered money from the drugs trade and succeeded in achieving many arrests in South America, Spain and elsewhere and in having a significant impact on one of the Colombian cartels. That was a Commonwealth country working with the United States, ourselves and others to achieve that.

The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) specifically asked, in relation to some of the smaller dependent territories, whether, when they have offshore banking regulatory regimes, the costs should be met by greater licence fees. A number of those dependent territories, such as the Cayman Islands and Bermuda, receive no development aid. Some dependent territories, such as Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands, do receive development aid. Because they are small territories, they need it. We regard responsible offshore finance as a means by which territories can achieve sustainable economies.

While I am on the topic of dependent territories, it may be helpful if I respond to the arguments of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). I shall not leave out any issues raised by other hon. Members, but it might be convenient to discuss these points at this stage.

Dependent territories are not colonies; we have no colonies left—they are dependent territories. They have legislative assemblies. I am sure that the hon. Member for Thurrock did not mean it in that way, but I am sure that the Chief Ministers of countries such as the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the British Virgin Islands,

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which have recently had democratic elections, would feel insulted if they thought that we in Westminster sought to interfere with their business.

In so far as the dependent territories have governors, those governors have reserve powers under the constitution. They are finite, limited powers under the constitution. The hon. Member for Thurrock is perfectly free to question Foreign Office and other Ministers about the responsibilities of those governors, in terms of those reserve powers, to the United Kingdom Government.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Minister is right. I was not referring to the Chief Ministers and colleagues in the local legislatures. Those matters which are devolved to them are their affair, and I very much welcome that. It is those powers that are reserved to the governor which need to be scrutinised. They include the very important function of policing. Policing is therefore exclusively the province of the governor and the Attorney-General is invariably appointed from Westminster. I think that such powers need greater scrutiny.

Mr. Baldry: They are very much reserve powers. The governor would exercise powers over policing only if there had been some failure by the local legislative assembly to ensure that its territory was properly policed.

Mr. Mackinlay: Policing is not its function.

Mr. Baldry: Yes, it is. I am conscious that the hon. Gentleman wishes to take a greater interest in the subject. If he formed a team of his colleagues, we might start with St. Helena. If they would like to visit St. Helena in the next six weeks or so, I am sure that the Government Chief Whip might be prevailed on to find the requisite funds.

As the hon. Member for Thurrock obviously wants to take an interest in the dependent territories, I should tell him that, if he visits the Foreign Office, officials will, I am sure, be happy to brief him on how limited the reserve powers of governors are nowadays. The dependent territories are, by and large, countries which determine their own decisions. Bermuda, which is a dependent territory, as the hon. Gentleman knows, has recently published a Green Paper and is debating whether it might consider moving towards independence.

It is absolutely right that we should be especially worried about parts of the Commonwealth which are in difficulty, and that we should be especially worried when parts of the Commonwealth are in difficulty with one another. In my opening comments, I referred to the position of Pakistan and India, which is of great concern to every friend of both countries.

It is tempting to think that either the United Kingdom or some other country or organisation could do something to take the process forward, but an imposed solution to Kashmir would be doomed to fail. Progress will only be made if India and Pakistan talk to each other and seek to resolve the situation in Kashmir themselves.

It is worth remembering that the Simla agreement was reached through discussions between Prime Minister Bhutto, the father of the current Prime Minister of Pakistan, and Mrs. Ghandi when she was Prime Minister of India. They made considerable progress in those talks, and the evidence of history is that the greatest progress has been made when India and Pakistan talk to each other.

We have made it clear that we feel that there needs to be a genuine political process in Kashmir—the status quo cannot continue for ever—with full recognition of human rights and a cessation of external support for violence in Kashmir. Those are important prerequisites.

On the broader issue of Pakistan, we were all delighted to welcome Prime Minister Bhutto to the United Kingdom last year. She came to a successful investment conference organised by the Confederation of British Industry and she obviously had the opportunity for discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and many others. She was a welcome visitor.

Next week I will lead a trade mission to Pakistan of some 50 business men and women, who are keen to invest in that country. They recognise that there is potential for partnership with it. I am sure that the Government of Pakistan see in the United Kingdom a people and Government who are keen to work with Pakistan to ensure its stability and development. It is a crucial country in the Commonwealth as it stands at the gateway to central Asia. We often look to Pakistan for advice on developments in that region. There is no shortage of desire to ensure that there is stability in Pakistan and that its Government is supported in their efforts to achieve economic stability and economic progress.

Mr. Galloway: I am grateful to the Minister for what he has said and I wish him and the trade delegation well when they leave next week. Before he concludes his remarks on Kashmir, can he explain how it is that under international law, according to United Nations resolutions, there must be a plebiscite so that the people of Jammu and Kashmir can decide for themselves whether they wish to remain in India, join Pakistan or, for that matter, strike out as an independent country? The Simla agreement cannot supersede those UN resolutions, which have the force of international law.

In as much as the Simla accord was useful, does the Minister agree that bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan have run into the sand, or the snow, as I acknowledged earlier? Now there are no substantial negotiations or talks between those countries. All that I asked for in my speech was for Britain and the Commonwealth to kick-start that process, perhaps through an eminent persons group. Will the Minister give that request some consideration?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that we spend a considerable amount of time considering the difficulties of and concerns about Kashmir. Many parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House quite rightly and most helpfully keep Ministers briefed on their visits to Kashmir, their impressions of it and their contacts with politicians on all sides of the equation.

We are firmly convinced, however, that progress will come about only when India and Pakistan decide that it is in their best interests to talk to each other. The Commonwealth can and will interfere only if Pakistan

and India request it to intervene. Long-term sustainable progress will come about only when India and Pakistan talk to each other. As I have said, all the evidence of history is that the greatest progress is made when India and Pakistan talk to each other.

In addition to speaking about Kashmir, my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) raised the issue of Sri Lanka. He will be interested and pleased to know that the President of Sri Lanka was in London this week. She had discussions today with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and with me two days ago. Much of what we discussed with her dealt with what more we could do to help the peace process in Sri Lanka move forward.

Since the election of the President of Sri Lanka, considerable strides have been made in the peace process, which seeks to resolve the difficulties with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the north. That process appears to be temporarily halted, and we were keen to understand what more we could do to help her in that regard. We are certainly willing to give what support we can to move the process forward. We all earnestly hope that, by the time the CPA conference takes place in Colombo later this year, the peace process in Sri Lanka will have made considerable progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington summed up well our attitude towards the non-proliferation treaty. It is a valuable instrument in trying to ensure that world peace is sustained, and in the post-cold war era it is all the more important that the non-proliferation regime is sustained.

Mr. Forman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for responding to the three issues that I touched on. Perhaps I could ask about the issue which concerns me and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). The Minister spoke rather disparagingly about Britain or the Commonwealth seeking to impose a solution in relation to Kashmir or of seeking to interfere between India and Pakistan. That was not the sense of what I and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) were seeking to say.

We sought to say that we should take every opportunity, bilaterally and through the Commonwealth, to make our good offices available in different ways to facilitate some sort of coming together and a rational process. If that does not happen, the dispute has all the qualities necessary to turn the area into a serious flashpoint, possibly with wider implications for the world as a whole.

Mr. Baldry: Progress will be made only if India and Pakistan decide to talk and move matters forward in their best interests and in the best interests of the people of Kashmir. If at any time India and Pakistan come to us together and say, "We would like the assistance of the United Kingdom or the Commonwealth to facilitate progress on this issue," it is inconceivable that we would do anything other than seek to be supportive. But we cannot seek to be an umpire or to impose some solution on India and Pakistan. That is the straightforward position.

Mr. Foulkes: I should like to press the Minister on this issue. It would be wrong for us to expect the Minister to respond immediately to the powerful case that was put by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman). It would be helpful to the House for the Minister to say that he will take this matter away and have a word with the Foreign Secretary to find out his reaction to these suggestions. In the light of the well argued case of my hon. Friend, that is the least that the Minister can do, and I hope that he will do it.

Mr. Baldry: It is always tempting to take problems away, but it would be disingenuous of me to do that, because this issue has been raised frequently with us. We have given it careful consideration over a long time and, as I have said, our clear view is that progress in Kashmir will be made only if the Governments of India and Pakistan talk to each other, if a genuine political process is started in Kashmir, if there is full recognition of human rights there, and if there is a cessation of external support for violence in Kashmir. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Minister not understand that the Simla accord is more than 20 years old, that about seven bilateral sets of talks have taken place between India and Pakistan, and that India has shown a marked reluctance to discuss Kashmir in any meaningful way? As the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) just said from a sedentary position, peace would never have come to South Africa if the Minister's attitude towards Kashmir had been displayed towards creating democracy in South Africa.

We are asking for some fresh thinking. Like the Foreign Office in its policy on Kashmir in the past five years, the Minister seems to be whistling in the dark. No elections will take place in Kashmir. The overwhelming majority of people in Kashmir want the right to determine their own destiny. We are asking the Commonwealth to take an initiative to ensure that peace and the right to determine their affairs come to the people of Kashmir, as it has come to the people of South Africa.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman is asking for the Commonwealth unilaterally to interfere—*[Interruption.]* Yes, he is. He is asking it unilaterally to interfere in the internal affairs of two Commonwealth countries. Its rules are clear: it can intervene only if both Pakistan and India request its involvement. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has a large number of constituents who take a particular interest in the Kashmir issue—that is understandable—but I repeat that in my view, and in that of the Government and the vast majority of people, sustainable progress on the Kashmir issue will be made only if India and Pakistan talk to each other, with each country wishing to reach a solution without other parties' involvement, and without it looking as though we or others are seeking to act as umpires or to impose some solution on those two countries.

Mr. Menzies Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I shall not give way any more on this, as I have comprehensively explained our position on Kashmir. It seems that the spokesmen from the two Opposition parties are being slightly disingenuous in the way in which they are approaching the issue. It is a

[Mr. Baldry]

difficult subject, which is of considerable concern to two of our Commonwealth colleagues. I have made our position clear. If either the Liberal or the Labour spokesmen is suggesting that progress should be made other than in the way I have suggested—which is by talks between India and Pakistan, by genuine political process in Kashmir, by a cessation of external support for violence, and by recognition of human rights in Kashmir—they owe a duty to the House to make that clear.

Mr. Campbell: In the Minister's anxiety not to prejudice the position, he has closed his mind to another possibility, which some of the interventions have sought to embrace. It is right to say that progress will be made only when the two countries agree to talk to each other, but what is wrong with the Commonwealth encouraging them to talk to each other?

Mr. Baldry: It is clear from everything that I have said that we and everyone should continue to encourage India and Pakistan to talk to each other. We do that whenever we have any discussions with members of the Indian or Pakistan Government. If I have the opportunity next week when I am in Islamabad and elsewhere, I am sure that I shall repeat what I have said to the House today. Of course we take every opportunity to urge India and Pakistan to talk to each other and to make progress on the issue, because we are aware that it is of considerable concern to many people, but real sustainable progress will be made only if India and Pakistan talk to each other. There is no disagreement about that.

I should like to make two final points for completeness. In relation to Ireland, there is always a danger of it looking as though the UK is speaking for the Commonwealth. It is always tempting to think that we can speak for the Commonwealth, but we would appear presumptuous if it were thought that we were doing so. It is self-evident that countries are applying and do apply for membership of the Commonwealth, and the Government of Ireland must know that it is always open to them to do likewise if they choose to do so.

The last time I studied the statute of Westminster was for my university law finals. Having heard all the horrific things which might occur as a consequence of that statute, I should like to take the matter away, reflect upon it, discuss it with the Law Officers and write to the hon. Member for Thurrock, who raised a cornucopia of problems.

I hope that I have responded to all the specific points raised by hon. Members. I must mention the Commonwealth Institute, because it is important. I should make it clear that the Government emphatically do not want the institute to close: we want it to use the fine building in Kensington high street, provided by the Government, to promote the Commonwealth in a modern way and to be able to stand increasingly on its own feet. I certainly commend the work of the institute's board. The director-general and his staff have shown commendable drive and imagination in developing a re-launch strategy, and it was because of that that Ministers judged the strategy worthy of support.

As I said in July last year, we offered an extra £2.4 million to help with the institute's own fund raising. We have set the institute the target of raising £5 million in the next 18 months. The Government hope that the public, businesses and all those who see the Commonwealth as a force for good will respond generously. When the institute raises that sum, as I hope it will, we shall be ready to respond speedily to ensure that the windows of opportunity that have been alluded to are taken advantage of and that no opportunity is missed. As I have said, we wish the Commonwealth Institute to continue.

This has been a helpful and welcome debate. I hope that I have responded to all the points that have been raised and I hope that it will not be too long before we have another debate on the Commonwealth.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

PROCEEDS OF CRIME BILL

Ordered,

That it be an Instruction to the Standing Committee on the Proceeds of Crime Bill that they have power to make provision in the Bill for facilitating the enforcement of overseas forfeiture and restraint orders.—*[Mr. Baldry.]*

Power Line (Vale of York)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Baldry.]*

9.36 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am grateful to Madam Speaker for selecting for debate the proposal for a new 400 kV power line through the vale of York. I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to the Dispatch Box. It is good to see him there. I understand that this is his first Adjournment debate. In wishing him many more, I am thinking only of the length of his ministerial career.

This is the fifth time that the matter has been raised on the Floor of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who is in his place, has raised the matter twice and I have raised it twice. That speaks for itself.

From time to time, all hon. Members experience local controversy over planning matters. Over time, opposition generally wanes, perhaps following a detailed examination of the facts at a public inquiry. That is not the case with this issue, for reasons that I shall outline shortly.

The debate arises out of decisions taken over four years ago on the construction of a gas-fired electricity generating plant—ENRON—at Wilton on Teesside and the subsequent requirements for the electricity generated to be connected to the national grid.

In September 1990, before the then Secretary of State for Energy gave planning consent for ENRON, the Office of Electricity Regulation issued a derogation to the National Grid Company for ENRON's connection to the grid. Under the Electricity Act 1989, the NGC had a statutory duty to provide that.

Shortly afterwards, the NGC entered into an agreement with Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric to increase the interconnection and transmission capability between Scotland the north of England. It was a purely commercial decision by the NGC. As a direct consequence, the NGC concluded that it would need to strengthen the transmission capacity in Yorkshire and, in September 1991, it lodged an application with North Yorkshire county council for the construction of a 400 kV overhead line from Lakenby to Picton and from Picton to Shipton through the entire length of the vale of York.

The proposed line would extend over some 56 km of open countryside. That was the first intimation to local authorities in Yorkshire that the construction of ENRON would have such profound implications for local communities. It highlights a fundamental weakness in the planning process for power stations. There is no requirement to consider the need for transmission into the national grid, or to assess whether the location of a power station makes sense in terms of national energy strategy.

Without question, had the North Yorkshire local authorities been consulted when the ENRON application was considered, they would have registered the strongest opposition. At the very least, they would have sought to ensure that conditions be attached to any planning consent, restricting further power lines in the county.

It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that the communities affected by the Vale of York power line proposal feel let down by the planning system. The public inquiry held in 1992 was not seen as sufficiently independent. The inspectors, who were appointed by the Department of Trade and Industry, rather than by the Department of the Environment as happens in all other planning matters, constantly gave the impression that their job was to smooth the way for the power line to be built rather than to make an impartial and objective assessment of the NGC's claims.

Throughout, the NGC relied on the argument that it was merely seeking to fulfil a legal duty. The inspectors agreed and seemed to think that they had no choice. The final paragraph of their report to the Secretary of State states:

"we are satisfied that for NGC to comply with their statutory responsibilities and the terms and conditions of the transmission licence there is a need to reinforce the transmission system."

Surely, planning should never be about just "technical" issues. The views of people whose lives are affected must have weight, as they do in any other planning matters, yet the inspectors rejected their concerns. All that seems to matter is that the NGC fulfils its legal requirements regardless of all else.

It seems that we should forget about agricultural interests, concerns about health and the fact that there has not been a proper environmental assessment—a point that I have already raised with Environment Ministers on the Floor of the House. It seems that we should forget that the better solution of undergrounding does not suit the NGC's balance sheet or that the area itself derives no benefit from the proposal—the NGC's interests are paramount. I suggest that that is not a sustainable position for the Government to take.

It is little wonder that local people are up in arms. When the public inquiry was held in 1992, more than 8,000 objections were lodged. Since then, a petition organised by REVOLT—a group campaigning against the power line—collected more than 12,000 signatures and has been lodged with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Opposition to the proposed power line has strengthened as the weakness of the NGC case and the deficiencies in the structure of the electricity industry and energy industry generally post-privatisation have become more apparent. If there is one message that I want the Minister to take from the debate, it is that North Yorkshire says no to the power line proposal.

Although we have begun the Adjournment debate slightly earlier than usual, time will not allow a full examination of all the facts. I suspect that my hon. Friend the Minister has spent many hours reading the various reports and papers. I have, and so has my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks.

The following issues are relevant. First, the NGC has failed to establish that the new line is needed. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will doubtless tell us that my hon. Friend and I have that wrong. We have not; he has. It is worth bearing in mind the fact that a 400 kV power line already exists throughout the length of the proposed route. Its capacity is 5,560 mVA—do not ask me to explain, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what that means. The important fact is that that capacity is the highest of any part of the national grid. That is the stretch that it is proposed to strengthen.

[Mr. John Greenway]

The route is significantly under-utilised. The derogation granted to the NGC to connect the ENRON power station to the grid has proved entirely adequate. The inspector's report following the 1992 inquiry went into considerable detail in considering whether the temporary derogation should become permanent. The arguments against extending the derogation are unconvincing and acknowledge disagreement within the electricity industry on transmission standards.

At the 1992 inquiry, Dr. Ian Davis, on behalf of the NGC, conceded that the organisation

"take a commonsense view of the application of transmission standards, taking into account the costs and the potential benefits in each case, so departure is often argued for in reasoned terms and can often be justified."

In other words, the NGC interprets the standards to suit itself.

I have mentioned the need to improve the link with Scotland, which was the NGC's commercial decision. That need has also been argued as a justification for the power line. But why construct a second high-voltage line on the east side of Yorkshire to cater for Scottish power, which is transmitted on the west coast of Scotland to Carlisle, when the extra load of the export of electricity of 750 MW could be carried south of Carlisle on existing lines, which in the NGC's seven-year statements show a surplus capacity of 2,400 MW?

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, two other gas-fired generating stations for the north-east coast, Flotilla and Neptune, are under consideration. The inspectors and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sought to argue that the transmission demands of ENRON and Scottish electricity exports are in themselves sufficient to justify strengthening the national grid, but no one is in any doubt that the accommodation of the additional capacity from Neptune and Flotilla is the real reason for the NGC seeking to strengthen the grid.

Indeed, the NGC has already entered into agreements with Neptune and Flotilla for connection into the grid. Yet no formal applications for planning consent for either Neptune or Flotilla have even been lodged. Potentially, they are very much in the future. They may never be given planning consent. They do not justify bolstering the NGC's case for new transmission lines at this time.

It is worth bearing it in mind that a connection agreement with no planning consent in Hampshire and an agreement in Lincolnshire with consent have recently been cancelled. The future of energy generation and pricing is under review. We read in the press this week that the future of the NGC sell-off is in doubt. At the very least, the current uncertainties dictate that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should postpone any final decision on the NGC application.

As I have already said, there is also continuing uncertainty about transmission standards. The NGC has merely adopted the standards established in the 1970s by the Central Electricity Generating Board with no regard to improved technology and despite the fact that faults on the NGC transmission system are currently less than one minute per customer per year. That is a security of supply of 99.999 per cent. The position with the regional electricity companies is rather less remarkable, amounting to an average for connected customers of 164 minutes' disruption a year. Why on earth do we wish to despoil the countryside of North Yorkshire for a potential loss of that one minute per customer per year?

The higher the standard of transmission, the greater the eventual cost for the customer. The NGC also has a vested interest in shifting electricity round the country. That is how it earns its money. However, in the case of ENRON, it results in a power loss of up to 6 per cent. because of the distance over which the electricity is transmitted. With Scottish exports, the power loss may be up to 10 per cent.

Mindful of the importance of those issues, shortly after the 1992 inquiry, Professor Littlechild ordered the NGC to conduct a review of four areas of transmission standards: operating standards, planning standards, connection standards and quality criteria. It took the NGC almost two years to respond. It consulted generators, RECs, interconnectors and customers, but not the environmental lobby. It seems that only North Yorkshire local authorities made representations on the environment, because other local authorities and environmental groups were unaware that the review was taking place.

Bearing in mind the two years that it took the NGC to respond in its review of its own transmission standards, Professor Littlechild has now given until 31 March—just two weeks' time—for a wider input of views. I remind my hon. Friend the Minister that section 3 of the Electricity Act 1989 places a duty on the regulator to take into account the effects of electricity transmission on the physical environment. It is part of the case of those who oppose the line through North Yorkshire that that duty has not been properly exercised.

In a statement in February, Professor Littlechild made it clear that he was not satisfied with the retention of the existing standards, although provisionally—and I stress provisionally—he did not intend to make changes in the short term. He also confirmed that he intends to look with Ofgas at the relative pricing of electricity and gas transmission lines and that he will then return to the question of the pricing of transmission and its implications for price control by the NGC. In other words, the whole question of transmission standards, in addition to the NGC's future and what will happen to electricity generating policy, remains in a state of flux.

The Minister will doubtless argue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks and I have heard so many times in the past, that the Secretary of State will have to reach a final decision on the matter based on the transmission standards as they apply at the time he makes his decision. With respect, that is simply not good enough.

As each day passes, it becomes ever clearer that the privatised energy utilities are capable of delivering greater efficiency and lower prices. That is what came out of our own regional electricity company, Northern Electric, in its spirited defence, which I supported, after the Trafalgar House bid. That is what has prompted the further review of prices announced by Professor Littlechild, about which we have heard so much during the past seven or eight days.

In two or three years' time, as a consequence of all this, we could be looking at a completely different requirement for transmission. Why, then, should this proposed power line be foisted on the people of north Yorkshire when the argument in favour is at best doubtful, and at worst—particularly in the longer term—totally unnecessary?

We must also ask who will pay for the new power line and for all the nonsense that has been going on. Who will pay all the costs of the inquiries? There is only one answer—the consumer. It will certainly not be the NGC or the power generator at ENRON.

As the Minister is aware, a further public inquiry is now under way at Northallerton, examining alternative proposals for two sections of the proposed power line route. Many of the issues that I mentioned are being raised in further evidence to the inspectors.

Local landowners have expressed total dissatisfaction with the handling of the inquiry and the unseemly haste with which proceedings are being carried forward. The attitude of the NGC and of the inspectors does nothing to enhance the credibility of the DTI. The current inquiry is also considering the question of wayleaves.

Before finishing my speech, I stress in the strongest possible terms the fact that two thirds of the landowners affected by the proposal have not reached agreement with the NGC for the siting of pylons on their land. In some cases, cash offers in excess of £40,000 have been refused. It is not like Yorkshire farmers to refuse that sort of money without good reason.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister, on this serious matter, to give an undertaking tonight that, so long as the majority of landowners fail to reach agreement with the NGC, the Secretary of State will not use his powers to impose agreements. Landowners and farmers are resisting the bullying tactics of the NGC, to demonstrate their outright opposition to the power line and their belief that any truly subjective independent appraisal of the NGC's application would result in the plan being shelved.

In responding to the inspectors' report in May last year, the President of the Board of Trade said that he was "minded" to grant approval. I trust that my hon. Friend will confirm tonight that that does not mean that my right hon. Friend has already made up his mind, and that there is still time for him to be influenced and to come to a different decision.

I hope that in this brief debate I have given my hon. Friend the facts that he needs to persuade the officials in his Department, and ultimately the President of the Board of Trade, to think again. For the reasons that I outlined, there is sufficient doubt about the direction of future energy policy not to proceed with the construction of a second 400 kV power line through the vale of York unless and until it is inescapably required.

If people were convinced that the power line was inescapably required, the opposition to it would be nothing like as strong or as vehement. But the NGC has dismally failed to provide a justification. ENRON has been generating electricity for two years, since the winter of 1992-93, and the lights have not gone out yet. In spite of that, and in spite of all the other uncertainties about future transmission requirements, the NGC is ploughing ahead with new commitments, although the power line proposal has not yet been approved. Such action is insensitive, to say the least, bearing in mind the strong opposition to the proposal.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister to reassure me, my constituents and the people in the Richmond constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks. Even more people are affected in Richmond than in Ryedale, and we are finding it bad enough. Minister, please reassure us that the NGC has no authority from the Department to behave in such a cavalier fashion, and that in response to the most strongly felt public anger that I have ever known, the Department will reject the NGC proposal, or at the very least postpone indefinitely any final decision. Please listen to the voice of local people in north Yorkshire. Tonight that voice says emphatically, "No, no and no again," to the National Grid Company.

9.59 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): I know from experience how difficult it is to obtain time for debates of this kind. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on his success, and thank him for the kind words with which he opened the debate.

There have been two previous Adjournment debates on this matter, the others having taken place in 1991 and 1992. It must be quite unusual for three Adjournment debates to be held on the subject of a single overhead line project: that demonstrates the level of concern. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the zeal and effectiveness with which he has pursued the interests of his constituents, not only this evening but over the long history of the project.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Page.*]

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend's constituents can know that, whatever the outcome of the proposal, he has represented them in a most effective and forceful fashion. Having read the files that have accumulated over the years, I know that he has been a definitive and powerful force in expressing their concerns.

It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to other hon. Members on both sides of the House who have acted in a similar fashion on behalf of their constituents. Let me particularly mention my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who raised the matter on the two previous occasions. Despite his ministerial duties, he has made time to be present tonight; he sits beside me, a brooding presence, waiting to express the anxieties of his constituents.

I know that both my hon. Friends appreciate that I cannot discuss the merits or otherwise of the project. I can only view it as an ordinary Member of Parliament—as if such a project were proposed for my constituency. I understand my hon. Friends' natural concerns, but as a Minister I note that this would be one of the largest overhead line developments of recent years, and it is entirely appropriate for it to receive detailed scrutiny both throughout the planning process and in the House.

[Mr. Page]

All aspects of the project have been, or still are, the subject of statutory proceedings, reports of which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will consider carefully when making his decisions. I must therefore limit my remarks to general matters, and not the specific issues that have been raised in the public inquiries and local hearings.

It may be helpful if I remind the House of the background to the project and the current position. I know that my hon. Friends are vividly aware of the circumstances, but it is only right to put them on the record, because what is said tonight will command a wider audience.

The NGC submitted five applications for consent under the Electricity Act 1989, in September 1991. The applications suggested alternatives—two possible routes for the proposed line between Lackenby on Teesside and Picton in North Yorkshire, and three possible routes between Picton and Shipton, also in north Yorkshire.

Those applications were the subject of a long public inquiry in 1992, whose report my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade published on 12 May last year. At that time, he said that he was minded to accept the inspectors' recommendations but would make no final decisions on the five applications until the NGC had made progress in obtaining the appropriate rights over the land concerned. That is in line with his normal practice in cases where wayleaves have not been obtained.

The inquiry inspectors recommended that consent be granted for the major part of an overhead line between Lackenby and Shipton, combining elements of the five application routes, but recommended refusal for three sections of the line. It suggested undergrounding for one section and possible rerouting overhead for the other two sections.

Since that time, the NGC has pursued wayleave negotiations with the landowners involved. As few of the landowners were willing to grant wayleaves voluntarily—my hon. Friend referred to that forcibly this evening—the NGC applied to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade for necessary wayleaves under the provisions in schedule 4 to the Electricity Act 1989.

Local hearings on the applications were held in November and December 1994. The NGC has also submitted a compulsory purchase order relating to land required for the underground cable, including the sealing end compound, and new consent and wayleave applications in respect of alternative routes in the other two sections which my right hon. Friend suggested that he was minded to refuse consent. All those matters are the subject of a new public inquiry, which is currently in progress in Northallerton.

At this point, I should like to take the opportunity to put the record straight about certain complaints against my Department on procedural matters. For example, I am aware, from correspondence that I have seen, that there has been public comment that there has been complicity between my Department and the NGC—the applicant—on procedural matters. I reject such accusations unreservedly.

The House will appreciate that I have only recently acquired a direct interest in the project. I have found it somewhat ironic, given that the project was first applied for some three and a half years ago, that objectors to it have complained that my Department has been over-hasty in arranging inquiries and hearings.

Minimum periods of notice are laid down in statutory regulations. Wherever possible, and indeed in almost all cases, my Department has given the parties concerned longer notice than required by regulations. It is also true that those concerned have generally been aware from a date much earlier than receipt of the notice that a particular inquiry or hearing would be held following objections by the relevant local planning authority or relevant individuals. Therefore, as the House will understand, I reject completely any suggestion that individual parties have not had sufficient time to prepare their case for a particular inquiry or hearing.

I also understand that some objectors to the project have found it difficult to accept the appointment of Mr. Alan Walker as one of the inspectors at the public inquiry taking place at Northallerton. My hon. Friend did not refer to the matter, but it is right to put it on the record. The difficulty in acceptance of Mr. Walker is apparently because he was one of the inspectors who held wayleave hearings at the end of 1994.

I do not accept that Mr. Walker's role as an inspector is in any way compromised by his involvement in those hearings, even in so far as those hearings and the current inquiry raise common issues. The wayleave hearings dealt with site-specific interests relating to the granting of rights across specific pieces of land, rather than to all the planning issues associated with consent applications. Mr. Walker made it clear at the wayleave hearings that he would not be making any recommendations to my right hon. Friend on the generic issues considered at the 1992 public inquiry.

My hon. Friend touched on health issues only briefly—en passant, if *Hansard* can put "en passant". I do not know whether we are allowed to use little French phrases. I should like to make a comment on health. A large majority of those who have made representations to my right hon. Friend, either in correspondence or through the inquiries and hearings, have expressed anxiety about adverse health effects. In particular, an increased health risk has been perceived by the public as a result of studies published in other countries which suggest a possible association between electromagnetic fields and cancer.

My right hon. Friend can take into account only the most current and authoritative evidence available to him when he makes a decision, including advice from the Department of Health and the National Radiological Protection Board. That applies in the case of any overhead line decision and such decisions are being taken every day. The NRPB's current advice is that it has considered all the available information and has concluded that it does not establish that exposure to electromagnetic fields is a cause of cancer, although it provides some evidence to suggest that the possibility exists, which justifies moving forward with research.

The significance of an epidemiological study depends, among other things, on the strength of the association, the presence of dose-relationship, supporting experimental evidence and a credible biological explanation. Those tests for causality are not satisfied

for a link between electromagnetic fields and cancer and the NRPB does not therefore recommend the adoption of quantitative restrictions on human exposure to electromagnetic fields. Should, of course, the NRPB's advice change before my right hon. Friend reaches any decision on this project, he will take that new advice into account.

As I have said, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has yet to receive and consider a number of reports by independent inspectors on different aspects of the project. He is also obliged to consider any new relevant evidence which he receives before he makes his decisions. If he takes into consideration any such new evidence or new matter of fact which disposes him to disagree with the recommendations made by any of the inspectors, he must, under the relevant procedure, give the parties involved an opportunity to ask for the reopening of that inquiry.

I assure my hon. Friend and the House that no decisions on the various individual applications until my right hon. Friend will be taken before he is satisfied that he has all the information before him to enable him to take that decision. Furthermore, as the House will realise, my right hon. Friend cannot take a decision that will in any way restrict his discretion in relation to any other decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 17 March 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Home Energy Conservation Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

INTERPRETATION

9.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 12, after 'information,' insert 'advice,'.

The amendment takes account of the concern expressed in Committee that it should be clear that an energy conservation authority should be able to give advice to businesses in connection with energy conservation measures.

The hon Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) and members of the Committee were keen to encourage local authorities to work constructively with businesses to assist in energy conservation. My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) seemed surprised that Opposition Members were keen for local authorities to work with the private sector. That is indeed a change of tack from their previous policy but one, nevertheless, which should be welcomed.

The enthusiasm that I detected for local authorities and businesses to become partners in that way was noticeable. However, I pointed out in Committee that this did not, in my opinion, require specific mention of businesses on the face of the Bill, since such an inclusion would carry the temptation to cover just about everyone else as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), with his customary wisdom, suggested that we might consider the use of the words "advice" and "assistance" if they could seen to be adding anything worth while to the amendment that was being considered at the time. My hon. Friend will see that the amendment in my name indeed picks up on part of his observation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), expressed the wish that local authorities should be imaginative about their partnerships, and not just involve the business community. Schools, youth clubs, social clubs and magazines circulated within industry were cited as good examples of the various avenues which local authorities could go down and put to good use in their energy efficiency strategies. That demonstrates that businesses are not the be-all and end-all of partnership approaches in this area, and demonstrates precisely why I was concerned not to single out businesses for a particular mention on the face of the Bill, or to try to produce a catch-all definition without leaving out any group or organisation. I did not think that was the right approach, and undertook to reconsider.

The short and simple reference to "advice" in the amendment is the best way to take the matter forward. Advice can be directed at anyone an authority chooses.

As was rightly pointed out in Committee, businesses may have an important role in the implementation of energy conservation measures. In relation to our national programmes, businesses are involved in a number of ways, for example as approved contractors carrying out work under the home energy efficiency scheme—HEES—or as manufacturers or retailers participating in special promotions for equipment such as energy-saving light bulbs.

The HEES, of course, is working very well, and is administered for my Department by the Energy Action Grants Agency, EAGA, a private company in Newcastle. The agency approves installation companies to install whatever measures are deemed appropriate for a particular property, and has overall control of some £100 million worth of grants with effect from 1 April this year—a 45 per cent. increase on the current financial year—and will continue to add to the 1 million homes that have already benefited from the scheme in the first three years. I was recently privileged to be able to process the one millionth grant under the scheme, which I was pleased went, by coincidence, to one of my constituents.

The Energy Saving Trust, an independent organisation set up by the Government, British Gas, the 12 regional electricity companies, Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric is managing new programmes to promote the efficient use of energy by domestic and small business users. It has successfully involved businesses, for example, in its low-energy lighting scheme, which resulted in the sale of nearly as many low-energy light bulbs in eight weeks as had been sold the previous year.

Those are just two examples of the type of involvement that local authorities should be encouraging at a local level. Some have combined the enthusiasm of children for caring for the environment with business involvement through a scheme aimed at schoolchildren who were encouraged to persuade their parents to purchase low-energy light bulbs with the help of discounts agreed with the regional electricity company. I am also aware of a local authority that has involved schoolchildren in undertaking a survey of housing stock in its area, with the result being a basic but effective record of the energy efficiency of housing stock in its area.

Adding the word "advice" to the list of things covered by the term "energy conservation measures" in the Bill will ensure that authorities can include advice to businesses—or indeed other organisations which may be relevant in particular local circumstances—in the measures that they list in their reports. Advice may be directed at anyone, and singling out businesses as opposed to other organisations for mention on the face of the Bill might prove unnecessarily restrictive.

There is also no reason why a local authority should not involve businesses in other ways in the implementation of its energy efficiency strategy. As I have already said, help does not necessarily have to be restricted to the provision of advice alone. I also undertake that we shall draw authorities' attention to the scope for involving and

[(Mr. Robert B. Jones)]

co-operating with businesses in the guidance to be issued under clause 4. That will ensure that they consider the potential for involving businesses fully.

It is not the intention that the guidance will list all organisations, groups or businesses that local authorities should approach—that will be something for them to decide—and I would hope that many will already know which organisations locally can provide the best opportunity for spreading the energy efficiency message. I expect the guidance to provide appropriate pointers, especially to those who are less advanced than others.

I hope that my explanation will persuade hon. Members that there is good reason for the amended wording now proposed for this part of clause 1—a small but most important part—and that the amendment will be welcomed by the hon. Lady and by the House.

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): I hope that hon. Members will support the amendment. The Bill presented on Second Reading contained provision for giving advice to householders, and advice and assistance to businesses, so I especially welcome the Minister's amendment, which he promised in Committee would be forthcoming.

It is worth re-emphasising the fact that this is not a Bill that will force individuals to do things. However, local authorities are not expected to remain neutral on energy conservation. They should promote, inform, educate and advise in their attempts to persuade as many people as possible to tackle energy inefficiency in their homes.

I recently visited Sutton, where the council is carrying out infra-red surveys from the air, as other councils have done. Sutton has put the videos taken from the air on display, and experts are on hand to tell people why their homes may be leaking heat, and to advise them how best to tackle the inefficiencies.

That is the sort of thing that we should encourage councils and businesses to do. Incidentally, may I tell the Minister that I have never been against local councils and businesses co-operating? I have always thought that we should promote such co-operation, as I did as a councillor—and I know that many of my Liberal Democrat colleagues do precisely the same.

I hope that we have now killed any belief that the Bill will bring the thermal thought police into people's homes. Advice has always been the key to the Bill's success, and I urge all hon. Members to support the Minister's amendment, which I welcome.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on the Bill, which I certainly support. Indeed, it has wide support. The idea of thermal thought police horrifies us all, but I understand that those of us who wear them will still be allowed to wear our thermals—indeed, they probably save energy from outside sources.

I underscore what the Minister about the valuable work of the Energy Saving Trust. Although it is an information-giving body, what people positively need, whether as home owners or in their businesses, is advice. Information is one thing and advice is quite another. That is not a small semantic point. Those of us who are interested in language appreciate the importance of the difference between information and advice.

I welcome the amendment because it will make the Bill more likely to promote activity, as the hon. Lady and the sponsors of the Bill intend. I have been associated with the sponsors and others interested in the Bill for a long time, and I think that people need specific advice that they can relate to their own properties, whatever those may be. That idea is implicit in the amendment.

I am sure that the House will remember that I had the luck, or the skill—it was probably luck—to inspire the Chancellor of the Exchequer to put an extra £20 million into home insulation during the closing stages of the memorable debate on VAT on fuel.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): My hon. Friend was so persuasive.

9.45 am

Mr. Greenway: The extra money will certainly help many people to achieve better home insulation based on the advice specified in the amendment. There is no doubt that people are fairly unaware of the importance of home insulation, and of how it can be carried out in a way that will not bung up their homes.

The other day I wrote to an elderly constituent who had complained about her heating bill. I can well understand that, because she is a lady of over 80 who is not very well, with high blood pressure and so on. She asked me what she could do, and I told her that I had just had the pleasure of being present at the inauguration of an excellent home insulation scheme in the home of her neighbour, Mrs. Dormer, in Greenford road, and said, "Why don't I try to arrange for something similar for you? It is available to all pensioners."

The lady wrote back to say that she did not want her home bunged up with windows that she could not open and doors that got stuck. Proper advice would reassure her that that was not likely to happen. Those of us who have been to see the work in homes and businesses will testify to the skill of those who carry it out and to the fact that it is convenient and does not bung up homes and businesses in any way.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): My hon. Friend will be aware of the excellent ConservEnergy scheme funded in part by EAGA as well as by other organisations such as Esso. The scheme helps in the individual private homes of old people, by fitting draught excluders and so on. I have assisted by putting in draught excluder strips and various other items in the home of a pensioner in Stone, in my constituency, and I can assure my hon. Friend that I certainly did not bung it up.

Mr. Greenway: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. There is no limit to his talent; it is really tremendous. I inaugurated a scheme under the Home Energy Trust for Mrs. Dormer, whom I have already mentioned, and I did take a hammer and put in the last nail which had conveniently been left for me, but I must confess that I did nothing like the scale of work that my hon. Friend has told us about.

Mr. Fabricant: I was wearing an Esso ConservEnergy hat and apron at the time, and one local councillor told me that I looked very cute in them.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend is not only a man of enormous talent and skill—

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): And a leader of fashion too.

Mr. Greenway: Yes, that too. He excels in every way. I expect to see him running in the marathon soon—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wearing the hat."]—yes, wearing his helmet and anything else that will enhance energy saving and raise money for good causes.

I must return to the Bill, as I am sure you will require me to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I support the amendment. The spirit in which it was moved by the Minister and accepted by the promoter of the Bill gives the House a proper hope that the Bill will succeed. If the Bill achieves its aims, we will have to congratulate not just the hon. Member for Christchurch, the Bill's sponsors and the many people who have thought out the valuable contribution to energy saving which the Bill will make, but my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government on their work in an area in which they are not given sufficient credit. The Government have produced some enormous achievements in energy saving.

I re-emphasise to all concerned in energy saving that advice is easily obtained, and that the Bill will enhance that position. When home or business insulation has been undertaken properly, savings to pensioners, businesses and others of some 33 per cent. can be achieved. I have heard of examples where energy bills have been halved following such action, and that can be nothing but helpful to the elderly and the sick, who have energy needs as we all do.

Mr. Merchant: The amendment is fairly narrowly drawn and that is something of a shame, as this is the first opportunity that I have had to participate in discussions on the Bill.

In supporting the amendment, I must say that I strongly support the thrust of the Bill, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on bringing it to the House. Energy conservation is an interest of mine, and I have been involved in a number of related projects. Only this week I was given second prize in a Waste Watch competition, for which I was given an energy-saving bulb. I declared that there was only one room in my house that did not have such a bulb, and that was why that prize was chosen.

The reason why I like the Bill, which this amendment will not spoil, is that it has a light touch and yet goes to the heart of the problem. The difficulty with the Energy Conservation Bill which came before the House last year—great though it was in principle—was that it was somewhat heavy in practice and application. If the hon. Lady is a member of the thermal thought police, I am sure that she holds a fairly low rank. Her right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—who unfortunately has slipped off, no doubt on a covert operation—is, I think, secretly the chief of the thermal police. *[Interruption.]* I see that the right hon. Gentleman has finished his secret task.

The central theme of the Bill is the need to give good advice. That advice must not just go to householders—vital though they may be—but must be in the form of a partnership with businesses, and this amendment stresses the importance of a partnership with business. The Bill aims to espouse good practice, which all authorities should aim to follow in the pursuit of energy conservation and its promotion.

Partnership has not always been popular. Like my hon. Friend the Minister, I remember when the old Labour party—now long-departed, or perhaps shortly departed—was not keen on encouraging a partnership with business.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): It has departed until after the next election.

Mr. Merchant: My hon. Friend is right. The old Labour party was not keen on fostering co-operation with business, and it even condemned the idea.

I am glad that Labour authorities, like others controlled by the other parties, are now keen to encourage partnership. We have seen partnership for business purposes in the encouragement of enterprise agencies and the regeneration of economic development. It is important that, in putting the message across on energy conservation and ensuring that the best means are adopted, the same sort of co-operation takes place.

The local authority which represents my constituency, Bromley, prides itself on being an enabling authority. I am sure that, in pursuit of the laudable objectives of this Bill, it would want to operate in conjunction with the suppliers of energy services and with suppliers in the area of energy conservation. For example, publicity for the use of low-energy bulbs and goods which will enable householders to operate in a more energy-conscious way could be produced in co-operation with local retailers and providers of electricity services.

The borough has encouraged co-operation with local newspapers in housing projects, and that could be continued into the area of energy conservation. One can even envisage authorities liaising with double glazing companies—this would have to be done carefully—to promote the advantages of double glazing in terms of energy conservation.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to confirm that there is no exclusive need for partnership with business, and that that partnership can extend beyond business. It is important for local authorities and energy conservation authorities to extend that co-operation to the voluntary sector, including schools, youth clubs and magazines which have a great deal to contribute in this regard.

Schools are particularly important, because sometimes the best way of encouraging parents to co-operate in a laudable scheme is to use children, who can be employed as an eye-catching means of promoting an objective by taking it home and sharing it with their parents. There is a lot that parents can learn from their children, and ultimately from the schools. With two young children of my own, I am continually reminded of that.

We must persuade people to spend their own money on energy conservation. There is a role for the public sector in providing grants and loans, but, to a large proportion of the population, they are not relevant. What matters is encouraging those people to spend their money on measures which they might not have thought about otherwise. Amending the Bill to encourage the giving of advice to organisations—particularly businesses—will help achieve that. The message that I am trying to encourage is that the Bill will work best as a partnership. It will work if local authorities and energy conservation authorities work closely with their local communities to put into effect the Bill's objective, and I hope that the amendment will achieve an improvement.

Finally, will my hon. Friend the Minister look carefully at the cost implications to local authorities of the Bill? My authority—which has made it clear that it supports the Bill—is nevertheless concerned about its implications. Bromley is a well-managed local authority, and it

[Mr. Merchant]

obviously wants to take fully into account any cost implications for itself and for its council tax payers, while supporting the objectives of the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend can give some guidance as to how authorities can defray the costs involved and to what extent they can bring in funds which can be redirected to the costs of the audits that they will be required to carry out.

I welcome the amendment, which will improve the Bill, although perhaps only in a small way. I am glad also that it has given me the opportunity to register my strong support for the principle behind the Bill.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: I have come to the House of Commons this morning not only to support the Bill but to take part in the debate, and in particular to speak to the amendments. The first amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Minister is highly relevant. It puts the onus on local authorities to give advice on energy conservation. It is extremely important in this day and age that we seek to meet our Rio commitments on emissions and ensure proper energy conservation, which has an impact on the care of the elderly. It is important that authorities should provide the advice that is required. The amendment, which adds the word "advice" to the requirements placed on the housing authorities, is highly relevant.

In the borough of Gravesham, the requirement falls on the housing department of Gravesham borough council. That is where the reference to advice is so important. We rightly do not rely solely on the local authorities nowadays to ensure that all that should be done locally is done. We rely on our local authorities to provide advice and act in a co-ordinating function as an information channel. I have looked into the energy conservation advice that is available to my constituents. Gravesham borough council housing department advises people to take up the support and information that is available from a number of other organisations.

10 am

I draw the attention of the House to the advice that can be made available to residents in respect of energy conservation by an imaginative scheme introduced by Moat housing society, which operates in north-west Kent. I have visited it several times recently. Its care and repair scheme will be of particular benefit for home energy conservation. It assists particularly the elderly to put together all that is needed to improve energy conservation in their homes.

People receive advice on matters such as the priority that they should give to energy conservation, how they can find financial and grant assistance for energy conservation work and, above all, how they can find reliable and effective contractors to carry out energy conservation measures in their homes. One of the greatest problems that people have is finding advice on how to go about carrying out proper energy conservation.

The Moat housing care and repair scheme draws heavily on the Government's home energy efficiency scheme. As we all know, the scheme provides grants to vulnerable members of society for basic energy efficiency measures such as loft insulation, tank and pipe lagging and draught-proofing. It is interesting to note that the resources for the scheme have almost doubled in the current financial year. That has allowed the Government to provide grants to more than 200,000 extra households per year. For the coming year, more than £100 million will be available. That is a 45 per cent. increase on the current year.

When those resources are made available by the Government, it is essential that advice is available to residents so that they know how to take up the resources and apply them to their housing to conserve energy. That is particularly relevant for the elderly, who are more vulnerable than most to the problem of cold in the winter.

Another scheme that should be brought to the attention of the public and, therefore, should be included in the advice provided by the borough council is the neighbourhood energy action scheme co-ordinated by ConservEnergy. I was involved in ConservEnergy week in my constituency late last year. It is interesting to know that, through neighbourhood energy action, the scheme co-ordinates a national network of agencies that provide services under the home energy efficiency scheme. It monitors the effectiveness of the policy framework and identifies good practice. That needs to be put into practical terms for local residents. That is why it is valuable that advice is available for the public and that the Bill will place the onus on housing authorities to provide that very advice.

Late last year, I was invited to see a scheme in Gravesham whereby assistance was given to a blind person in Gravesend. The scheme completed insulation and draughtproofing work on his house. The work was carried out by a contractor who was a member of neighbourhood energy action and held the appropriate certification of Weatherguard insulation services.

So the Bill and in particular the provisions of the clause will take the matter further. I strongly support my hon. Friend the Minister in requiring the relevant authorities to provide advice on these important matters.

Mr. Fabricant: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. May I say how nice it is that we have some agreement across the Floor of the House. I have to confess that, had I been in the House when it voted to bring television into the Chamber, I would have voted for it. However, if the matter came up again, I would have grave doubts about it, because television has trivialised much of what happens in the House. The more thoughtful debates are not shown on television. So many people think that Labour Members, Conservative Members and Liberal Democrats are always at each other's throats. Of course that is not the case. I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on coming up with this worthwhile Bill.

I am particularly pleased with the amendment. It has broadened the scope of application of the Bill. In Staffordshire, we have many schools which have flat roofs. That is common in other counties. Other hon. Members are nodding in assent. Flat-roofed buildings are prone to losing heat. That puts an extra burden on school budgets. This is an ideal opportunity for the energy conservation authorities to give advice to schools, particularly those which have chosen to become grant-maintained and separated themselves from local education authority control.

The Bill also encourages people to invest their own money. It is an investment. It is a question not of spending but of investing money. It is an investment not only to save on future energy bills for homes and businesses, but

for the future of our children and our children's children and the welfare of the whole world. I would love to see similar Bills introduced in other countries. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will recommend in the Council of Ministers that similar measures be adopted in other member states of the European Union.

I have already mentioned that I have taken part in the ConservEnergy programme. It is an excellent programme. It was initiated by the Energy Action Grants Agency. It enables elderly people to insulate their homes not only to conserve energy and reduce world pollution but to save money for themselves. The Bill is a double-edged sword which works for the benefit of all.

If we are undergoing climatic change, we should all be aware of the measures that we can take to conserve energy. I have worked extensively in northern Europe in countries such as Iceland. I worked with Icelandic radio, Rikisutvarpid and Islenska Utvarpsfelagid, the independent station, which I suspect, I will have to spell for the *Hansard* reporters. Towns such as Reykjavik and Akureyri are particularly prone to harsh winds and cold climates, although it is not as cold in Reykjavik as some might think because of the Gulf stream.

We are well aware of the need for energy conservation and the measures that they have taken in Iceland are quite trivial in that they are easily undertaken, so one would think that we could do it in the United Kingdom. Double glazing is a recent event in this country and one would think that that would be a sensible move.

The energy conservation authority can advise on such items of expenditure and initiatives. This amendment enables the authority not only to advise on homes, but to advise schools and businesses. One would think that businesses would initiate their own ways to save money and operating overheads for their companies, but small businesses often do not have the expertise to seek advice—there has been a huge growth in the registration of new small businesses—and would be extremely wary about going to a firm of architects, who could charge a huge amount of money for advice on energy conservation.

The establishment of energy conservation authorities throughout the United Kingdom, will provide a one-stop shop of thermal thought police—that is an expression that will be used a lot today—where people can go for advice and to find out how to invest their money most wisely, to ensure that their homes and businesses are insulated and to lower their operating costs.

Few people have any awareness of low-energy lighting, which has been mentioned. Hon. Members will be aware that it has already been fitted to most of the lights in the Palace of Westminster and its outbuildings. The cost of a low-energy lamp might at first seem prohibitive, yet one can regain it over two or three years. For those who have doubts about it, the energy conservation authority will be able to provide statistics on the energy and cost savings that are possible and on the best applications.

I confess that I was amused to hear the hon. Member for Christchurch refer to aircraft undertaking thermal imaging over Sutton. I wondered whether there was a bright spot over the home of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), where I suspect that a huge amount of hot air and wastage might be going into the upper atmosphere, although I am sure that it is in no way a pollutant. But perhaps I misjudge her, and she has insulated her home so that it is especially warm and pleasant.

The Bill is very helpful. Perhaps it is just the first step, but it is a necessary first step to ensure that operating costs are lower for businesses and to promote the welfare of the world's ecology. Extending the first clause with the addition of the word "advice" and ensuring that we take in schools, businesses and charitable organisations, as well as homes, is a wise amendment, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), this is the first opportunity that I have had to speak in this debate and on the Bill. As he said, the amendment is narrowly drawn, but I want to give the Bill a warm welcome and to congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on introducing it and my hon. Friend the Minister, who has ensured that it has Government support.

The Bill is directly relevant to my constituency. The very name High Peak makes people realise why energy conservation is important there. In that most glorious part of the peak district, we are the highest inhabited part of England. Inevitably, therefore, conservation and energy use issues will affect my constituency more than many other parts of the country. My constituents look to Christchurch as being on the balmy south coast—essentially a riviera-type environment, in comparison with some of the weather conditions that we have to endure.

Buxton is not just famous for its water, but is the name of the place that, on every weather forecast, seems to have endured the worst weather the previous day. It is invariably the coldest place in Britain and often the wettest, but it is also one of the nicest and jolliest places in the country. Therefore, we have a particular interest in this Bill.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I think that you will allow me to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that perhaps the beer in Buxton contributes to the jollity. They make very good beer there, as we know.

10.15 am

Mr. Hendry: I suspect that my hon. Friend may be thinking of Burton, which is a little down the road, but we certainly add to our conviviality by consuming small amounts, in moderation.

Mr. Greenway: I know about the beer in Burton, but there is also beer in Buxton. If my hon. Friend does not know about it, I will take him along to try it some time.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Apart from the different forms of liquid that characterise the town, we are a rural community and have many small, old buildings, many of which have ill-fitting windows, where double glazing came very late, and draughty cellars, so we need particular advice and help. The Bill will be of great support to my constituents, as it will ensure that they can live in more comfort and will cut the cost of doing so in the process.

I used to live in a little village called Sparrowpit, which is perched on the hills outside Buxton, and it always struck me that there was nothing between it and the Urals. Having shot across northern Europe, the first place that the winds hit was my back door. It was like living in a sieve and it did not feel as if there were any panes in the windows. However much one bunged up every gap, the

[Mr. Hendry]

wind still came in. On one occasion, I removed the panelling under the sink only to discover that it was full of snow. I took out two sink loads, but no one could find the hole through which the snow had come into the house. That shows that we will be very grateful for the measures in the Bill.

On the amendment, the importance of advice cannot be underestimated and I welcome its inclusion. There are two different aspects. First, advice as distinct from information must be made available to householders as, for many elderly people, information is not sufficient. They are concerned about what they will be doing and about letting people whom they do not know into their homes. The information they get might be fairly general, but they will find it comforting and helpful to know that they can get independent advice through a statutory body.

The most important aspect of the inclusion of the word "advice", and the reason for its inclusion, is that it enables the Bill to go further than was initially envisaged. There was concern that it should be completely clear that an authority should be able to give advice to businesses that might want to offer energy conservation services.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham emphasised, it is most important that businesses work in tandem with the authorities in this. That is the way in which they and the local authorities would want to go forward. The Bill has the backing of the authorities in Derbyshire—not merely the borough councils, but also Derbyshire county council. I am glad that we have managed to find one area—perhaps the only one—on which the county council and I are in agreement. More importantly, it is vital that the authorities will be able to operate in conjunction with businesses and will not have to say that they cannot advise them because they are organisations that will be making money out of advising people how their homes can be better insulated and how they can conserve energy more effectively.

The inclusion of the word "advice" means that best practice can much more effectively be spread among the range of companies that will offer advice, information and services in this sector. Many companies are coming into this sector. In my constituency, they come from Chesterfield or from the north-west side of the Pennines. An increasing number of companies, which are often small businesses—one or two-man or woman businesses—seek to provide services in this sector. The fact that they will not be excluded from receiving advice is much to be welcomed.

There are substantive elements in the Bill to which I shall come later. Suffice it to say that the provision of advice is an important step forward because it goes beyond information. I welcome its inclusion in the Bill.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Like my hon. Friends, I welcome the Bill and especially the amendment, which would add giving advice to the duties and powers of local authorities in promoting energy efficiency measures. Like them, I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on her wisdom in promoting the Bill, which will, I am sure, find favour in the House and duly become law. I cannot agree with every dot and comma of the Bill; given the circumstances, it would be curious if I did. Nevertheless, I congratulate the hon. Lady.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis)—he is not in his place, but sitting in the Special Strangers' Gallery—on his work in introducing similar legislation. I was a sponsor of his Energy Conservation Bill. He first identified the importance of ensuring that energy audits for individual houses and the advice resulting from that were made available.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), I believe that it is important for councils to be able to give advice. Although the climate in my area is as hospitable as my constituents, we have many houses that were built in the 1950s and 1940s. They do not come up to modern standards of insulation, and therefore waste energy unnecessarily.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) I believe that our commitments under the Rio treaty are important in reducing CO_2 emissions and in ensuring that temperatures do not reach the levels that are anticipated in the next 100 years. Although an increase of 0.3 deg C on average across the world may not sound a great deal, it could lead to an increase in sea level of 6 cm. That could be extremely damaging and, I understand, irreversible.

It must, however, be said that some bodies, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs, have called into question global warming. They have advanced the argument that many of the monitoring stations that anticipate an increase in global warming do so purely because they are in a position different from that of 10 or 20 years ago. In many parts of America, the monitoring stations have been overtaken by urban and suburban developments, which means that there is greater heat retention. When that is stripped out of the equation, it may be found that global warming is not the problem that has been anticipated. Nevertheless, let us assume that it is a problem. The advice which, under the amendment, would have to be given by councils to people such as my constituents is important.

After the Rio summit, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that there must be a balance between people's needs and the environment in which they live. My view is that, when the council gives advice to constituents, people will find that the conflict is not as severe as anticipated. Energy efficiency is also cost efficiency and cost efficiency means greater competitiveness, whether in the domestic or in the industrial sphere. I hope that councils will lay down clearly the improvements in efficiency that they anticipate in their areas as a result of the Bill. In giving advice to local businesses and local people, it may be more difficult than anticipated to be categorical about what the savings might be.

I am pleased that the scope of the Bill has been extended. Clause 2(4) refers to

"the extent of decreases in emissions into the atmosphere of oxides of nitrogen and sulphur dioxide"

in addition to carbon dioxide. I understand that it is estimated that there is a potential 75 per cent. saving in nitrous oxide emissions which will have a significant health effect as well as an environmental effect. Such emissions may be significantly connected with the large increase in reported asthma cases in hospitals and GP surgeries over the past 10 years. It is estimated that, over the past 10 years, the incidence of reported asthma has increased by about 50 per cent., which is remarkable.

Asthma appears to be the only life-threatening disease that is significantly on the increase in the United Kingdom. It would be a brave man who did not link that increase to the increasing environmental pollution and CO_2 emissions with which the advice from local authorities and the whole thrust of the Bill are meant to deal.

You may recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a debate on the Adjournment about three weeks ago, which I initiated, on the health effects of congestion and the emissions from vehicles. I hope that the Bill and the advice that councils are able to give as a result of it will make a significant contribution to solving that problem.

The second-year report from the Government entitled "This Common Inheritance" says:

"Using energy efficiently is the quickest and most cost-effective way of reducing CO_2 emissions."

I understand from international organisations that monitor air quality that the United Kingdom is likely to be one of the few nations, through the Bill and the significant reduction in emissions that it will bring about, and through the advice that councils will be able to give to local communities under the amendment, that will meet the target.

It could be argued that the target of a 5 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions may be significantly too modest. It is estimated that, by 2005, Germany will achieve a reduction of between 25 per cent. and 30 per cent. in CO_2 emissions and that Denmark will achieve a 20 per cent. reduction. The poorer countries in Europe, such as Greece, Portugal and Spain, may have to increase their CO_2 emissions as their economies develop industrially. The more sophisticated and developed industrialised nations may, therefore, have an obligation to reduce their CO_2 emissions, thus reducing CO_2 emissions throughout Europe as a whole.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that, although 30 per cent. of CO_2 emissions come from industry and 21 per cent. from road transport—one might have expected those percentages to be much higher—as much as 27 per cent. of emissions come from domestic usage? Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is important because it will save energy not only in the home for the sake of home owners but for the sake of the general ecology of the world?

10.30 am

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why the advice that will be given by councils to domestic householders will make a significant contribution towards achieving the target reduction of 10 million tonnes of carbon by the year 2000. Currently, 158 million tonnes of carbon are emitted into the atmosphere every year in the United Kingdom.

The advice that will be given to communities by councils will build upon some of the advice-driven initiatives of central Government. In 1992, the "helping the earth begins at home campaign" pointed out that, every year, the average household emits some 7.5 tonnes of carbon as a result of energy usage. The document "Wasting Energy Costs the Earth", published in 1994, also drew attention to that fact.

I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) and for High Peak about the importance of labelling on energy-saving merchandise, in particular energy-saving light bulbs. As a result of the amendment, individual householders will be made aware of where those energy-saving devices are most easily available and which firms can correctly install them. Their use would make a significant contribution to reducing CO_2 emissions and meeting the desired target.

I also hope that councils will advise householders about the home energy efficiency scheme, which, according to my calculations from documents on the Bill available in the Library, accounts for some £102 million per year of taxpayers' spending. Since 1991, that scheme has ensured that no fewer than half a million homes have been insulated.

On 24 February, I visited my constituent, Mrs. Ethel Swift, of 20 Rosemary road. She had been given advice by the council about the conservation of energy scheme through neighbourhood energy action. We watched as people registered by the council insulated her loft and draught-stripped her windows and front door. I am sure that those measures will make a substantial contribution to Mrs. Swift's energy needs, so that she will be able to maintain the same level of heating while using far less energy. As a result, her energy bills and the CO_2 emissions from her home will be reduced.

As a result of the amendment, I should like councils to advise landlords of their obligations under the Housing Act 1985. The Institute of Environmental Assessment has also stressed the importance of those obligations. It believes that energy efficiency should be part of the fitness standards applied to houses that are assessed for potential grant aid through either the home energy efficiency scheme or more general grant aid provisions.

I also hope that, when councils give advice to households, they will stress the importance of the Energy Saving Trust and, in particular, the availability of local energy advice centres. They have been set up as a result of co-operation between the private and public sectors, the Government, British Gas, regional electricity companies and Scottish Power. I understand that some problems have arisen as a result of Ms Spottiswoode's opinion on the E-factor and whether it can be used, in part, to fund the Energy Saving Trust. Nevertheless, work agreed by the trust—for example, loft insulation—the lagging of hot water pipes, draught-stripping and heating controls has benefited about 350,000 houses.

I hope that local authorities will be able to advise my constituents about the availability of local energy advice centres. If, as I hope, additional finance is made available to the Energy Saving Trust, I also hope that my constituents will be able to take advantage of the advice offered by the trust.

I also hope that projects can be developed, again as a result of the advice offered by councils, with third parties, which could fund schemes such as the home energy efficiency scheme and the Energy Saving Trust. Private companies which put money into those schemes would be able to benefit from savings made by individual householders as a result of the installation of energy-saving equipment. For instance, according to the energy efficiency policies drawn up in 1993, an agreement was reached between New York city and Benec Industries, which installed, inter alia, insulation and boiler modifications on the same lines as those made by the

[Mr. Coombs]

Energy Saving Trust, in municipally owned flats. The savings in the heating bills paid by the city were shared between New York and Benec Industries.

Ms Ruddock: I am absolutely fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's commitment to the Energy Saving Trust.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: If the hon. Lady sat down, we would hear some more about that commitment.

Ms Ruddock: I do not think that that intervention from a sedentary position was necessary.

If the hon. Member for Wyre Forest is so concerned that sufficient moneys should be available to the Energy Saving Trust and shares my concern about the attitude of the regulator about that, he should persuade his hon. Friends on the Front Bench to tackle that problem through the Gas Bill, which is before the House.

Mr. Coombs: It is possible that, as a result of the long, eloquent speeches of my hon. Friends, the Minister will be so persuaded and will talk to his colleagues who are handling that Bill.

Advice is important, but it is useful only if it is specific and leads to action by householders. It is estimated that, on average, it will cost local authorities £40,000 to provide advice to householders. I am concerned that councils will, however, effectively have to guess the potential energy-saving measures that could be adopted in each home.

For instance, energy saving may be all about lagging pipes or loft insulation, but it is difficult to inspect a house from the outside and to guess what those energy savings might be. We must not forget that the Bill does not permit councils right of entry. It is those householders who do not pay a great deal of attention to energy saving who will need such advice, but it is precisely those people who will not be prepared to allow councils in to inspect their homes.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Has my hon. Friend had my good fortune to see aerial photographs of streets from which it is possible to spot heat escaping from the lofts of certain houses that are not insulated? Such photographs reveal that insulation could result in energy saving.

Mr. Coombs: That is a good point.

I return to the advice that councils will give as a result of their assessment of the cost of the energy conservation measures set out in clause 2, subsection (3)(a), and also as a result of their assessment of the extent to which carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere would decrease as a result of those measures.

I ask the Minister through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how, as a result of spending about £41,000 a year, which is about enough to pay two officers, any meaningful information about savings, monetary or of carbon dioxide, will be gained from councils, given the fact that they will generally do a roadside check on houses which will be very rough indeed. Some householders to whom they will give advice will have insulated their houses. Some will have done it 30 years ago, others 10 years ago. I am at a loss to know how one will obtain a sensible evaluation of the carbon dioxide emissions that could be saved or of the costs of energy conservation measures that could be taken.

It is very difficult to avoid that problem without giving the thought police, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire said, powers of entry into houses so that they can inspect lagging and loft insulation, which no one would want. I question the value of the information that individual local authorities will be able to elicit, and therefore the value of the reports that they will be able to produce.

Ms Ruddock: I do not know whether this is helpful, but I am told that two local authorities, Derby city council and Newark and Sherwood district council, estimated that they could secure the information required, not by the Bill, as it happens, but by the previous Bill, the Energy Conservation Bill—the Bill before us is simpler—so it might cost even less. Their estimate was £50,000 to do a full energy audit per local authority, but they decided to do it on the basis of 10 per cent. of homes, which seems feasible to all of us.

Obviously, many people, when they know that there is a local authority scheme that will prove helpful, would be prepared to volunteer and to allow people to enter their homes on a voluntary basis by agreement because they would understand, as the hon. Member for Wyre Forest obviously does, the great gains that could result from such a process of information-gathering.

Mr. Coombs: Let us hope that people do allow the local authority into their homes in the enlightened way that the hon. Lady has described. Let us also hope that the homes that are inspected are representative of homes in the district, so giving more than a spurious accuracy to the figures on which the advice about which we are now talking is based.

I say to the Minister that there is no value in an exercise such as that unless it leads to action being taken by householders whose energy savings will potentially be assessed. It is my opinion that people do not take any action to improve their loft insulation or their pipe insulation and so on for two reasons. First, they do not know specifically the savings that will be made in their properties, as opposed to the district as a whole, and secondly, they are afraid of being ripped off by contractors who are likely to do a shoddy job.

If the advice that local authorities give as a result of the amendment includes, as in the ConserveEnergy scheme in some areas, lists of reputable contractors who can be relied on to do a good job and to give an accurate estimate of the specific reductions in energy bills that will be made possible by insulation and loft insulation and lagging and so on, it would be worth while. However, the Government need to keep a close eye on it if the measure is to be as effective as it should be.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I apologise if I strike a somewhat discordant note in the debate, as I often appear to do in the worthy debates that we hold on a Friday morning. Everyone has congratulated the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on an excellent Bill. We all realise the costs that are involved in wasting energy and we know that the country has an energy bill of about £50 billion a year, so we are right to seek ways to reduce that.

What do we emerge with at the end of that long discussion about ways to save energy? We emerge with a Bill that I am neutral about, which I neither support nor oppose, which I fear will be pointless. All that will happen

is that a certain amount of money will be spent by local authorities on producing more reports. Do we really need more reports written by more local authority officers?

Mr. Merchant: More paperwork.

10.45 am

Mr. Leigh: The Bill may cost only more paperwork, as my hon. Friend says. It may only cost £40,000 or £50,000 per authority. From personal experience of the way in which local authorities work, the way in which empires grow and the way in which officers are appointed for all types of worthy causes, I doubt that the cost will be limited to that sum. However, that is a central part of the Bill. We all know, as we have read the Bill, that the report by the local authorities shall include

"an assessment of the cost of the energy conservation measures set out in it".

I am afraid that I hold a different opinion of the way to save energy. It must be left to people. Householders will decide, and businesses—amendment No. 2 is especially about businesses. Householders will choose to save energy if the cost of their energy increases to such a level that their personal circumstances, or the market, or whatever, forces them to save energy.

Many reports—worthy reports, which are detailed in the Bill and in the amendment—are written by local authority officers and however much we talk about a partnership between local authorities and businesses, and however much we encourage businesses to become involved and so on, they are busy people who are already burdened by a great deal of regulation by local authorities, and they will act only if it is in their economic interest so to act. They will act if the cost of energy increases.

None of us liked VAT on fuel, but we voted for it, and one of the reasons for doing so was to save energy and to make people aware of the true costs of energy. That is how we shall undertake our Rio commitments. We shall save energy if the price of energy reflects its true market value.

Ms Ruddock: Most of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues this morning have spoken about elderly women, many of them, I think, in their 80s.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Not necessarily female—mine was male.

Ms Ruddock: Well, elderly people. Some of them had female names, I note.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Well, it just happens that Ethel is a woman's name. It was a Mr.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

Ms Ruddock: Whether it is a man or a woman, let us say that many Conservative Members have spoken of elderly people in their homes suffering from energy loss, and about the work that has been done to insulate those homes better. How does the hon. Gentleman think that a pure price mechanism, increasing the cost of fuel to households of that kind, would achieve the objectives if there were not information gathering, and advice were not given to help such households?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would advise the hon. Gentleman not to go too far down that path. I have been very tolerant this morning, but many hon. Members have been getting back to the word, "advice", which has saved them, and saved my legs an awful lot as well. If they can stick formally to the amendment now, it would be helpful to the debate.

Mr. Leigh: I am glad that the hon. Lady made that intervention, because she has led me to the argument that I wanted to make in a moment. You are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker; one can answer that intervention by way of the amendment.

Advice is important, and we all understand that many elderly people need more heat than we younger people need, that they often live in older homes and that we have a duty to help them. That is why I do not oppose the Government's energy efficiency schemes. They constitute action, and that is what we should be talking about.

The Government, whom I support, have doubled the resources available to help elderly and disabled people to insulate their homes. The answer to the hon. Lady's question is that there is nothing wrong in the market mechanism and in intervening occasionally in the market when it does not work with a class of people. What is wrong is to assume, as the hon. Member for Christchurch does, that one can solve those problems simply by producing more and more reports and paperwork, and talking in worthy terms of advice, partnership and so on.

One achieves things in life by doing things. If one feels that the market is not working—if one feels that a class of people cannot afford to do up their homes, and their energy is being taxed more because they are part of society as a whole—one concludes that those people are being placed in an unfair position, and decides to help them. That is precisely what the Government are doing, and what the Bill does not do.

We have heard about the Energy Saving Trust, which is an excellent organisation and a private-sector initiative. It wants to save 2.5 million tonnes of carbon by the year 2000—an excellent goal. That organisation is trying to do something, but what will the Bill achieve? I suspect that it will simply create more paperwork.

Many people in the House, including the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), believe passionately that we smoke too many cigarettes. Is she suggesting that the way to deal with the problem is to introduce a Bill to give local authorities the power to carry out an assessment of cigarette smoking in their areas? That is not the answer. To stop people smoking cigarettes, we must tax cigarettes more highly. The same is true of drinking or of anything else.

I come from Lincolnshire—one of the coldest counties in the country. We have heard about what happens on High Peak, but when we in Lincolnshire get the east wind whistling off the North sea, there is nothing between us and the Urals. Once, when I was travelling along the top of the Lincolnshire wolds, I heard Moscow radio. I knew from the wind coming in through the car window that it was pretty cold. We know all about the importance of saving energy, heating our homes and why we have to do it, but we do not think that the cause will be helped by a report by West Lindsey district council, my local authority—a small council, which already has many duties laid upon it by the House. We criticise local authorities, but those who work in them say that it is all very well for people down south to talk in terms of large

[Mr. Leigh]

authorities and say, "It's only £40,000 or £50,000." That is a significant cost for my little local authority to bear, and the measure will not help anyone in the long run.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and one that I mentioned in my contribution when I said that action was more important than advice to my constituents when saving energy. In 1993, the Liberal party produced a document called "Taxing Pollution not People", which said that we should end

"the anomalous zero-rate of VAT on fuel".

Now, that party talks about phasing in an EU-wide carbon energy tax.

Mr. Leigh: We all know that the Liberal party is interested in advising people, but its advice is often different in different parts of the country and on different issues. The Liberals are primarily concerned with making political progress. Conservatives are concerned with the process of government and trying to achieve something.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to his post. He has a long record of interest in such issues. His moderate stance on the subject will allow us to make progress. I hope that when he winds up the debate he will try to answer the issues that I have raised and detail what the Government have done in a practical sense to encourage business and to deal with the problems through taxation or through the Department of Trade and Industry.

I hope that the rest of the debate will not be characterised by a lack of intellectual rigour and logic.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I strongly support the amendment, which emphasises the importance of advice. I should like to mention a couple of issues in relation to Wales, which apply also to England.

Local authorities will have the power to advise not only organisations in their own territories but organisations on a broader basis. In Wales as in England, housing associations are active. In Wales, they are funded by an all-Wales organisation, Tai Cymru, and in England by the Housing Corporation. Local authorities will have the power to advise and to influence the policy of an organisation such as Tai Cymru. That is currently causing difficulties in terms of constructing houses that are energy efficient.

The housing association grant—HAG—provided by Tai Cymru does not take sufficient account of the need for energy efficiency when designing homes. Tai Cymru recently produced a pattern book for housing design. I am told by housing associations that the book makes it more difficult than before to construct energy-efficient homes. I should like the Minister's confirmation, but I assume that local authorities' advice will be aimed at organisations such as the funding organisations—Tai Cymru in Wales and the Housing Corporation in England.

Can I take it that the undertakings given by the Minister in Committee will apply to Wales? Will the undertakings given on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment apply to the Secretary of State for Wales? Undertakings were given on when the Bill's provisions would be implemented. Will those undertakings apply to Wales? Other undertakings on ministerial guidance have been important in obtaining agreement on the Bill's form. I should like it to be made clear that such undertakings will apply to Wales—in particular that local government reorganisation will not be used as an excuse for postponing the implementation of the Bill's provisions in Wales.

I congratulate, and thank, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on taking up the cause in her Bill, which is now approaching fruition. It is a tribute not only to her persistence but to her vision, that she adopted the cause in the Bill rather than a less controversial one. It is also important to congratulate the Under-Secretary on his support. The importance of that support becomes clear when we hear some of the contributions that Conservative Members have made this morning.

The Bill will provide us with a UK-wide strategy on domestic property. Although the Bill contains no targets, we understand that targets will form part of ministerial guidance. The Bill is only a beginning: action—implementation of the provisions—is what counts. A framework of planning is essential. When planning, provisional advice to individuals and property owners is crucial. That is part of the process of developing among people a responsible attitude towards energy use.

Implementation of the measures will depend on the provision of resources to enable action to be taken. Considerable public resources will have to be made available if we are to take the subject seriously. The plans will provide a focus. The advice will establish and encourage heightened awareness of energy efficiency—bringing it down to a private and personal level of responsibility.

The organisation Friends of the Earth has recently been encouraging local authorities to adopt a climate resolution, which encourages local authorities and the people within them to take seriously the subject of energy—not just energy efficiency, but energy generally. That will include local authorities encouraging the development of renewable energy within their territories.

The importance of encouraging the growth of nuclear industry has been mentioned. Clearly, we should not adopt that policy, which tends to offer an unrealistic panacea.

Mr. Fabricant: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the nuclear industry, but does he agree that there should still be considerable research into it, particularly into fusion? Does he accept—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying from the amendment.

Mr. Dafis: I shall not say too much in response to that intervention. Huge research resources have been invested in the nuclear industry, and are still being invested in fusion. If we put a fraction of those resources into the development of renewables, we should be making an important contribution to the sort of issues contained in Friends of the Earth's climate resolution programme. I recently attended the launch in the House of an organisation called Euro Solar UK. I commend to all hon. Members the work of that organisation in exerting pressure for the development of renewables, which must go hand in hand with energy efficiency.

It is important to put the question into its proper context at this stage. We need not only an integrated energy efficiency policy but an integrated energy policy. The Bill represents the start of a process that, with good will on

the part of this and succeeding Governments, could lead to a general integrated energy policy, which must include a transport component.

11 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I may be last to speak in the debate, but I hope that I am not least.

Amendment No. 2 is a very important amendment which deals with advice. I should like to address the question of the quality of that advice and who will provide it. Unfortunately, the Bill tends to focus on the residential sector, but it is equally important to the commercial sector, because probably more progress can be made in the energy efficiency field within that sector.

First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on introducing the Home Energy Conservation Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), but the Bill does not involve the commercial sector at all.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was about to congratulate the hon. Lady on introducing the Bill and also to welcome the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), to the Front Bench. I understand that this is his debut Bill, and it is good to see him in the Chamber today.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State was Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, of which I am a member, which conducted an inquiry into energy efficiency. Advice about energy efficiency matters was an important element of the inquiry and we learned a lot about the various sources from which that advice can come.

With other colleagues, I was privileged to meet an elderly gentleman in my constituency who took part in the ConserveEnergy scheme run by the Energy Action Grants Agency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said, real action resulted from that scheme. My elderly constituent received advice about energy efficiency measures such as placing draught strips around doors and windows, installing an insulation jacket around his hot water cylinder and insulating the roof, and thus was able to reduce his energy bills significantly. He said that, as a result, he will be able to remain in his house for at least another two years rather than enter a residential home. He benefited from that excellent advice, and in so doing he saved himself and the country a considerable amount of money.

Hon. Members have already referred to the question of supplying advice to local authorities. I have some reservations about the immense scope of the legislation, and hence the bureaucracy that will confront local authorities. Clause 2, which deals with advice, is very wide in its scope. Under that clause, advice will apply to emissions of nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxide, the assessment of the number of jobs, the assessment of average savings and, as though that were not enough, such other matters as are considered appropriate. A considerable amount of bureaucracy could flow from that.

Fortunately, the saving grace comes in subsection (5) of clause 2, which states:

"An energy conservation authority may in preparing the report consult such persons as it considers appropriate."

I think that that is the key to the amendment, as it states who should provide advice on energy efficiency matters. As my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, the Energy Savings Trade Association—ESTA—is an umbrella organisation for 80 firms which are involved in the energy efficiency business and which give energy efficiency advice.

The field of energy efficiency advice is much more developed in other countries. For example, in the United States so-called contract energy management companies provide a considerable amount of advice not only to the public sector but to private individuals. The energy efficiency business is about local authorities and the public sector providing advice, but it also involves individuals because they are the ones who will benefit from that advice.

I hope that the Minister will mention the role of the private sector in giving advice. That is a very important point. In evidence to the Environment Select Committee, ESTA said that it could typically provide advice at rates five to 10 times cheaper than the public sector. I hope that my hon. Friend will encourage local authorities to approach private sector firms for advice when drawing up their energy efficiency plans.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will also refer to the public sector and to the Energy Efficiency Office, which is sponsored by his Department and which has not been referred to in the debate so far. That office is a major provider of advice. It sponsors the Energy Saving Trust, to which several hon. Members have referred. It has a budget of some £15 million to £20 million and it represents one of the best ways of disseminating advice about best practice throughout the country by way of its regional energy efficiency officers.

I hope that my hon. Friend will inform the House about the quality of advice delivered by those regional energy efficiency officers and how they will be able to assist individual local authorities in drawing up their plans. During the Committee's inquiry, concern was expressed that the regional energy efficiency officers network was not so complete as it might be. I am concerned that, if the Bill is passed today, it will be necessary to reinforce that regional network so that best practice information can be disseminated to local authorities very quickly.

I believe that this is a critical amendment. Local authorities must consult the very best sources about energy efficiency matters. The private sector is at the leading edge in providing that advice and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will encourage private sector firms to supply it. There is enormous scope for using that advice to improve the rather rundown, elderly housing stock in some local authority areas.

Ms Ruddock: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope to save both your legs and your voice by confining my remarks entirely to the amendment. I shall not emulate the performances of some Conservative Members whose contributions have, I think, resembled Second Reading speeches.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: How does the hon. Lady assesses the content of the very learned speeches by Labour Back Benchers on this important Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should settle down a little. The Chair will decide what is in order and what is not.

Ms Ruddock: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The amendment was clearly introduced as a result of the considerations by the hon. Member for Chichester—

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Christchurch.

Ms Ruddock: I apologise. I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on bringing the Bill to this stage.

Mr. Banks: What has that to do with the amendment?

Ms Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman would assist me no end if he could keep his remarks to himself and allow me to speak directly to the amendment.

In moving the amendment, the Minister referred to the consideration that had been given to supplying advice to business. I put it on the record that we are extremely keen that there should be a two-way process between local authorities and business in the collecting of information. There is much that can be gained from business giving advice to local authorities and vice versa.

The Labour party is committed to the partnerships that its local authorities have developed with local businesses. We have seen the positive results of those partnerships and there is no doubt that, as the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said, there is much to be gained by taking the advice of those commercially involved in energy efficiency. We have no problem with that. My local authority in Lewisham, which has been a pioneer in developing such partnerships, has shown how they can be applied to energy efficiency and savings.

I am grateful to the Minister for saying that, although he would not accept a provision limited to business, he intends to ensure that advice giving and, indeed, advice taking, is more widespread. We support that notion. The Minister states in his guidance that he will not be prescribing the limits or list of organisations, but we none the less hope that he will encourage and support the idea of the exchange of advice, which is be in all our interests.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) cast some aspersions on Labour councils in particular. I should like to put it on the record that we are extremely proud of their record and achievements, especially in the matter of energy conservation. Gathering information is essential if a council is to be able to give advice. It is impossible to give advice in a vacuum—information must be gathered on which that advice can properly be mounted.

My local authority in Lewisham has undertaken an energy audit of all its housing stock and surveyed the public buildings in its ownership to identify the scope for energy-saving measures. Those buildings include, of course, schools and youth clubs which have already been mentioned. That work has already been done and we are convinced that the Bill's provisions will make it possible to do much more.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am interested to hear that the hon. Lady's local authority has been giving itself advice. Was that advice given by its own officers or did it, as I suggested, take advice from private sector firms?

Ms Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman should not be surprised that a local authority is giving itself advice. The Bill offers the important opportunity for local authorities to assess what is required—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman will give me a moment, I am tackling his surprise that my local authority is giving itself advice.

We are aware, and I know that the Minister is, too, that much local authority housing stock, like that of the private sector, is badly insulated. No one denies that. There is a need to tackle the problem, but the relevant information needs first to be gathered. The local authority must advise itself although, of course, it consults experts and makes any advice available to its own officers. Clearly, if work needs to be done, it is in many cases passed to the private sector.

The work done by Lewisham council includes the giving of advice about what is necessary to make energy savings in individual homes.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Lady has been very generous in giving way. She stresses the role of local authorities, but she must accept that local businesses involved in energy conservation have a great deal of experience that they can offer directly. It is far cheaper and more efficient to look in the *Yellow Pages* and find the firms which have the necessary information and expertise. Why do local authorities need to advise themselves and produce reports? Surely that adds nothing but more regulation and cost.

Ms Ruddock: There is a good reason for local authorities to advise themselves. If information is to be gathered there has to be trust between public authorities and the people. It is sometimes necessary for people to be asked to allow officers into their homes when assessments have to be made. That is entirely appropriate for the gathering of information.

It is crucial that any advice given is independent; it is not appropriate that advice should be given by people who stand to gain commercially from giving it. The Government have acknowledged that central or local government departments can give advice of an independent nature which people can trust even if, as I said, any action resulting from that is more likely to involve contracts with the private sector. It would be ludicrous to believe that the Labour party does not want partnerships with the private sector. At this point, I may stray from the amendment if I am not careful, but I wish to point out that one of the reasons we value the Bill so much is that it will create jobs, and many of them will be in the private sector.

11.15 am

I conclude by mentioning the well known pioneering work in information gathering and advice giving done by Kirklees metropolitan council. The council has adopted an affordable warmth and energy efficient strategy to achieve lower fuel bills through a programme of insulation, ventilation—the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr.

Greenway) would be pleased to hear that if he were in the Chamber today—and heating combined with education and advice. The advice service is available to all residents, not only council tenants.

We support the amendment, which I am sure will be helpful in shaping the final Bill, and we thank the Minister for tabling it.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: With the leave of the House, I will reply to the debate.

I think that I am right in sensing that, with perhaps one or two exceptions, there is a warm welcome for the amendment, and I trust that it is also an energy-efficient welcome. We have dealt with a wide range of important issues relating to energy efficiency because, naturally enough, they have a strong link with advice. It is not terribly surprising, therefore, that we have focused on energy efficiency to a large extent.

I thank the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) for welcoming the amendment. We have tried to work together during the passage of the Bill to ensure that it is good legislation when, as I hope that it will, it reaches the statute book. This was one of those matters where our differences were more apparent than real, as we both clearly wanted advice to be given but not necessarily in an exclusive way.

The hon. Lady touched on the infra-red surveys in the London borough of Sutton, but I believe that a number of boroughs are also involved. That is an example of the practical way in which the message can be put across to people that they are a lot less energy-efficient than they think. It is my experience from dealing with my constituents that people always think that they have energy-efficient homes because they put in a bit of insulation many years ago. They believe that that is the be-all and end-all of energy efficiency. However, technology and standards change, and we need to ensure that advice is kept up to date and that people can take advantage of whatever is available at any given time.

Mr. Fabricant: Just 10 years ago, the advice was that 3 in of loft insulation lagging was sufficient, whereas 6 in is now regarded as the very minimum.

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right, and gives a pointed example of precisely the point that I am making.

I also think that it is important there should be a two-way involvement, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) said. I visited Leicester city council not so long ago—I think that it is controlled by the hon. Lady's party—and it was emphasising the way in which it works with businesses and how it encourages them to canvass for work in the areas in which people were more prosperous and could afford to put it energy conservation measures themselves.

That is one of the big gaps in the system. We aim a lot of effort at people who need the help, but it is much more difficult to get the message over to the people who can afford to sit down and write cheques for their energy bills. Trying to run a campaign to advise those people and then get them to do something about the advice will be one of the challenges for local authorities, for the Government and for all those involved.

There are, of course, good local authorities and not so good local authorities, and I am keen to improve the worst to the standards of the best and then improve them all. One of the initiatives we took recently was to invite a number of authorities to seminars—in Leeds and in Nottingham—which were aimed at trying to spread the word, using matrices so that people could identify where they were with particular areas of energy efficiency policy, and gradually to improve them over a period. I was delighted with the enthusiasm that developed among local authorities, which although they may not have been hostile to energy efficiency were clearly in need of advice through exchange of best practise. We shall continue to go down that road.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who is not with us—no doubt because he has gone off to insulate another home in whichever road it was in his constituency—mentioned his support for the Energy Saving Trust. That was echoed by a number of my hon. Friends and, indeed, implicitly by the hon. Member for Deptford. The Energy Saving Trust is an important element in our energy conservation strategy, and what it can do in terms of advice and in "catalysing" movements towards greater energy efficiency is key.

My hon. Friend also mentioned energy advice centres. They, too, have an important role to play. I recently visited the energy advice centre in the metropolitan borough of Sandwell, in the west midlands. Telephone calls came in from members of the public, and the staff talked people through the problems of their homes and the options that were available, giving advice and sending out leaflets that were tailor-made to those individuals. In that way, it was complying with the spirit of what my hon. Friend was talking about—namely, tailoring the advice to the particular circumstances. I think that that is the only way to get the message across to people with varied house types as to what they can practically do and what the pay-back is.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is much better for the energy advice offices to give advice direct to individuals, who will then do their own energy saving improvements, rather than local authorities trying to enforce energy efficiency measures?

Mr. Jones: I have always though that advice, provided that people are prepared to listen to it, is welcome to anybody. The energy advice centres are aimed primarily at individuals; we have other mechanisms by which to aim advice at local authorities.

The HEES is an excellent scheme, and it is clear, from what they have said, that many hon. Members have participated in their own constituencies, and that it is a good way of getting over to people the importance of the scheme and is helping to publicise it to those who, perhaps, have not learnt that it is available and therefore have not applied. My only worry about it is that, on occasions, so many of the good and the great are rushing in and out of the houses that the pay-back period must be lengthened considerably by the draughts that are coming through the door as a result of their being left open for photographs and so on. But that, perhaps, is a minor point. I was in the Chamber when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North, the extra £20 million, and I was delighted to hear that news, because it is one of our most excellent schemes, and I hope very much that people will take advantage of it.

[Mr. Jones]

I also welcome the involvement of private industry with energy action grants. Only last night, Esso presented £100,000 as its contribution for the coming year to the work being done. There is much good work going on, and I very much welcome the comments of hon. Members present.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) coined a phrase, which, I think, is apt in describing the Bill. He said that it has a light touch but goes to the heart of the problem. It is important to have that light touch to avoid what has been named the "thermal thought police issue", which was referred to by many hon. Members.

We have been trying, on both sides of the Committee and now the House, to develop a practical Bill that will result in action, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said, but to have action one needs a certain amount of information; otherwise, one will waste an awful lot of money through not having the right priorities. If one sees, as I do, the Bill and our energy conservation strategy as being not just about the environment but an anti-poverty strategy, one wants the right sort of information to be able to prioritise—to use that awful word—the investment that local authorities and the Government are putting in.

My hon. Friend stressed partnership with businesses and asked me to confirm that it would not be an exclusive role for businesses. I am happy to confirm that, because the whole spirit of what I was saying was that there are many other people who could be involved, and the voluntary sector is one of the most important of those. Hon. Members will be familiar with the work of organisations like Age Concern, for example, which does a lot of work to ensure that our messages are put across to target groups.

My hon. Friend also referred to the costs of the measure, as did a number of hon. Members. I repeat the undertaking that I gave in Committee that the new burdens procedure will apply and that we will discuss the resource implications with local authority associations. I do not necessarily accept that there is any cost in the end, because from research that we have had carried out, if local authorities put in energy efficiency measures in their stock, it can often result in lower maintenance costs, fewer voids, greater tenant satisfaction, and so on. There are swings as well as roundabouts, but we will want to examine the costs to ensure that they are not disproportionate and that the right outcome is there from the point of view of local authorities and ourselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) referred to the care and repair scheme. That is another example, not just of advice but of action, because the whole point of such schemes is that they help to ensure that the proper repairs to integrate energy conservation are used for the benefit of keeping people in their homes who might otherwise go into sheltered accommodation or an even more protective environment. It is a good scheme and I am pleased that we were able today to encourage its continuation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), with whom I cannot possibly compete in terms of cuteness and designer taste in clothing, made an important point about sharing ideas with other countries. There is a lot of interest in other countries with the way in which we are taking forward our best practice programme and many other energy-efficient measures. Although I am not anything like so distinguished as a member of the Council of Ministers, I will do my best to ensure that that work is continued and that the strategies that we are pursuing are shared with our friends and colleagues abroad, so that we can work towards a global target on energy efficiency and on the reduction of carbon dioxide. If it is not a global target, it has no meaning.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) said how cold it was in that part of Derbyshire. Having visited the area, I know that that is the case. He referred quite relevantly to the large number of older properties in such parts of the country. We must focus our attention on those areas because it is clearly absurd to put the same amount of effort into a city like Milton Keynes, which has a great deal of new property, as into a local authority with older stock and therefore a greater need for improvements in energy efficiency. That is why I was reluctant to see a universal target of 30 per cent. applying to all local authorities, as some would probably need to achieve a great deal more than 30 per cent.

11.30 am

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), in an erudite and well-informed speech—he has long been associated with campaigns for energy efficiency—made several points of a global nature. Even if we were to reject the whole concept of global warming, that would not make the slightest difference to the importance of this Bill. Whether we look at the matter from the point of view of an anti-poverty strategy, or simply as not wasting resources and saving cash, energy efficiency still makes sense. Energy efficiency is a win-win part of the environmental debate, and that is why it makes more sense to concentrate on energy efficiency than on many other possible weapons in our armoury.

In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire emphasised that a very large percentage of global warming gases come from the home, not just from the use of energy to heat and light homes, but also from the use of other equipment in homes. That is why advice on the energy efficiency of equipment is very important. My hon. Friend also referred to having a list of reputable traders.

There are some areas of energy efficiency where the take-up is lower than it might otherwise be because people distrust the methodology. One of the most obvious examples of that is cavity wall filling. I hope that the manufacturers and installers of cavity filling will take that message on board and develop something like a guarantee scheme, which would mean a greater reputation for what they are doing and therefore encourage a higher take-up.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) asked me about housing associations. He referred to the Welsh equivalent of the Housing Corporation. He will know that, of all the sectors, the housing association sector has the best record in terms of energy efficiency. That is largely because it has the highest percentage of new build. We have encouraged the housing association movement to go for a minimum energy efficiency in new development. Of course, a great deal is happening in respect of older development. One of the benefits of large-scale voluntary transfers is that the money available to local authorities and housing

associations has been spent on introducing energy efficiency programmes which are very much to the advantage of the tenants and the landlord alike.

In that context, I refer, as I did in Committee, to the Twynham housing association in the constituency of the hon. Member for Christchurch. I had the privilege of visiting that housing association a couple of weeks ago and I saw some of the excellent schemes. I spoke once again to representatives about their record on energy efficiency. I hope that that housing association will be imitated by others.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North also asked about guidance in Wales. My undertaking in Committee did not bind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. However, it is certainly true that the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment are talking to each other about how the guidance can be taken forward. There will be close consultation. The hon. Gentleman knows what normally happens in respect of such matters.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North asked about the effect of reorganisation. As a general point, not just in Wales, but in authorities in Scotland and England, it is not fair to expect authorities to draw up strategies when they face the greatest imposition in terms of other pressures. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will not allow authorities to have very much leeway, because we are anxious that they should make progress on developing strategies.

Mr. Dafis: Therefore, it is clear that local authorities will be able to advise an all-Wales organisation such as Tai Cymru, and require it to ensure that energy efficiency is built into its pattern books. Will the new unitary authorities in Wales be drawing up energy conservation plans during their first year of operation after reorganisation?

Mr. Jones: I anticipate that that would be so. As regards housing associations, we shall want to build on what is already happening around the country. In one excellent initiative involving several local authorities, where they are furnishing local housing association grants for developments, they are holding competitions to develop the most energy-efficient developments on those sites.

Other developments under the THERMIE programme will be so energy-efficient that everything else will be put in the shade. I visited one of those in Uttlesford district not long ago, where I believe that the total cost of space heating would be £25 a year. That is achieved by using heat exchangers on a whole terrace to obtain economies of scale.

Those are exciting developments. Although clearly the capital costs are that much higher, if we can reduce those costs a little and encourage that kind of joint provision, that is good news for future development. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North is aware, the challenge is not so much future development as what we do about past development where energy efficiency was not considered.

There is an awful lot of interesting advice around. I opened my post this morning and out fell a leaflet entitled "Bright Ideas Energy Forum" produced by my local authority area. That is an event where people will be able to get together and discuss energy conservation issues and learn from each other. Many private companies are participating in that. My local authority, Dacorum borough council, has been a pioneer in the area, and I am pleased to praise it as an excellent authority in every regard. It has developed a strategy and it has been implementing it and involving the community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury dwelt on several of the other organisations involved. I was delighted by his tribute to the Energy Efficiency Office. However, he was right to say that we must involve firms that belong to organisations like the Energy Saving Trade Association. We must build on the concept of contract energy management to ensure that buildings are more efficient. If we can attract capital from the private sector, that will make energy efficiency more attractive for local authorities.

We have had a very full debate and I am glad that the House welcomes the amendment. Advice to and from—as the hon. Member for Christchurch said—is the key to ensuring that we succeed in improving energy efficiency.

Mr. Leigh: As I was the only Conservative Member to whose speech my hon. Friend the Minister did not refer—[HON. MEMBERS: "He did."] If he did, I apologise. However, I repeat my question about my local authority of West Lindsey, which is a very small local authority. My hon. Friend dealt with the funding of local authorities, and he seemed to intimate that there were savings that could accrue to local authorities. He will be aware, however, that there is still a cost resource for local authorities in producing reports. Will he give a commitment on behalf of the Government that no extra costs will be imposed on small local authorities such as West Lindsey district council in drawing up the reports which, for such authorities, are a major expense?

Mr. Jones: Much will depend on where my hon. Friend's local authority stands in the pecking order in terms of what it has already done. As I have explained to hon. Members who have taken a long-standing interest in the subject, the Department has developed as part of the housing investment programme allocation system a requirement for local authorities to do an audit of their stock and to present an energy efficiency strategy. Many local authorities will need to do very little in addition to what they have already done. The very best will already be there, and over a period they will simply have to move through the various layers to achieve the energy efficiency savings that we ask of them.

Whether my hon. Friend's local authority is in the good, bad or indifferent category, I do not know. Perhaps he would like to come and discuss that with me and I can tell him, within the privacy of four walls, whether his local authority is with the goodies or the baddies. If it is among the goodies, it has no reason to fear that the requirement will do anything other than enhance its reputation and the energy efficiency of the homes that it owns and the other homes in its area, and win it much good will from people who are sometimes hard pressed by heating costs.

I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 14, after 'means,' insert '—(a)'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also No. 4, in page 1, line 16, at end insert ', or

(b) a mobile home, that is—

(i) in England and Wales or Scotland, a caravan within the meaning of Part I of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 (disregarding the amendment made by section 13(2) of the Caravan Sites Act 1968) which is a dwelling for the purposes of Part I or II of the Local Government Finance Act 1992,

(ii) in Northern Ireland, a caravan within the meaning of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 which is a dwelling-house for the purposes of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.'.

Mr. Jones: I am pleased that the hon. Member for Christchurch has added her name to amendment No. 4. I am glad that the spirit of co-operation that has prevailed throughout our consideration of the Bill is continuing. However, I am sure that all Members present will welcome some explanation of what has led to this definition.

Amendment No. 3 is purely a drafting amendment, and is necessary to identify the fact that the original definition of residential accommodation that has appeared on most versions of the Bill since our discussions started is only the first of two sub-definitions, which enables fuller account to be taken of mobile homes. The substantive amendment is amendment No. 4, which follows up the commitment I made in Committee to examine the best way of incorporating the hon. Lady's specific request to have, within the definition of residential accommodation, a reference to mobile homes.

From time to time, I come across mobile home sites and it is clear, without the need for detailed inspections, that many of the homes on those sites are fairly energy–inefficient. It seems sensible to try to involve local authorities in getting such homes up to scratch, in addition to using the HEES grants that are, of course, already available to owners of mobile homes.

As I said in Committee, I have no objection in principle to such homes being covered, and it seems only right and proper that they should be included in a local authority's strategy. We found, however, that it was not as simple as it first appeared to produce a suitable definition. We also had to consider how best to include such homes in Northern Ireland, where relevant legislation is different from that in Great Britain. Nevertheless, the amendment, based on existing legal definitions, in which the definition of a mobile home is broadly speaking the same as that for a caravan, should meet the hon. Lady's wishes.

The amendment extends the legal definition of residential accommodation in the Bill to include, for Great Britain, caravans as defined in the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. The definition now proposed covers any structure designed or adapted for human habitation which is capable of being moved from one place to another. Hon. Members may be interested to learn that railway rolling stock and tents are specifically excluded from the definition—

Mr. Fabricant: May I ask my hon. Friend not about rolling stock but about whether he has given any thought to extending the scope of the Bill to cover canal narrow boats and houseboats?

11.45 am

Mr. Jones: No, I have not, but perhaps during the debate I should. However, I hope that I shall not be pressed too hard to include tents and rolling stock.

Additionally, the caravans within the definition must be dwellings for the purposes of council tax. That will enable an energy conservation authority to identify easily mobile homes that can be regarded as permanently sited, and for which records will be available from the valuation lists.

Section 13(2) of the Caravan Sites Act 1968, which is referred to in the amendment, deals with large twin unit caravans. Those, again, are structures designed or adapted for human habitation, but are composed of not more than two sections and are capable of being designed to be assembled on site, and when assembled are physically capable of being moved by road from one place to another. Whatever the reasons for excluding them from other legislation, it is clearly right that those large and relatively immobile structures should be within the scope of the Bill.

The position in Northern Ireland is slightly different. References to the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 and the Local Government Finance Act 1992 do not extend to Northern Ireland. We therefore had to find some other legal definition which could ensure that coverage extended to Northern Ireland. As a consequence it is necessary to refer to Northern Ireland's equivalent legislation—the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 and the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. These two pieces of legislation provide for exactly the same coverage as in England, Scotland and Wales. I have no reason to believe that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which will act as the energy conservation authority for Northern Ireland, will have any difficulty in identifying the types of mobile homes that we want to cover.

The amendments should ensure that mobile homes designed for human habitation and used as reasonably permanent residential accommodation are not excluded from consideration when an authority draws up its energy conservation reports. The resultant definition of residential accommodation is, as I am sure hon. Members present will agree, short and concise.

There was a danger of the Bill's becoming too unwieldy, and possibly unworkable, if we had, for example, attempted to list all relevant residential accommodation. The list would surely have produced more lines of text than the Bill itself, and that would have been unnecessary and possibly unworkable, for reasons similar to those cited earlier in connection with the amendment concerning businesses. There is always a danger that specifically naming items for inclusion implies that everything else may be excluded.

I believe that the definition now proposed for residential accommodation is the right one, and should provide an energy conservation authority with absolutely no difficulty in identifying the type of properties to be covered by the Bill. The specific reference to mobile homes deals with a small but important category, and I hope it will reassure the hon. Lady's constituents who live in such properties, and indeed all residents of such properties, that they have no reason to be concerned about how they will fare under the provisions of the Bill.

I commend the amendments to the House.

Mrs. Maddock: I especially welcome amendments Nos. 3 and 4. As the Minister said, I raised the subject with him in Committee and I am grateful for his detailed attention to the matter.

My interest in the subject stems both from my experience as a member of the all-party mobile homes group and from my constituency interest. I have many mobile homes—or park homes, as they are often called—in my constituency. Only last week I presented an award for one of the best kept parks—Oak Tree Farm park in my constituency—and earlier this week I opened the park homes exhibit at the Ideal Home exhibition.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Why, in that case, were mobile homes and caravans not included in the Bill in the first place? Could the hon. Lady also give a measured response to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) about insulating canal boats, and whether they should be covered by the Bill?

Mrs. Maddock: I was surprised that we got away so lightly in the debate on amendment No. 2 when I saw that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who usually wants to put a spanner in the works, was here. To answer the first part of his question, the omission was probably an oversight on the part of many people. We tried to get the definition of a residential property right, and I spent considerable time in the Private Bill Office and in talking to DOE officials.

Many hon. Members may not realise how much time and energy is taken up not by the talk that goes on in the Chamber but by discussing with experts the best way of achieving our ends. We have continued to talk about the best way to define residential properties, and I hope that we have got that right now.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire may not realise the fact, but I have a special interest in canal boats. For 30 years I have travelled on such boats on many of the canals in this country, including those in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. No doubt it would be most helpful and useful to people who live on those boats if the Bill covered them, but if it would hold up the Bill's passage, perhaps we should leave that for another day.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *rose—*

Mrs. Maddock: I can see that the Minister would like to comment.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The hon. Lady will know that, in an entirely different capacity, I was a member of the all-party waterways group. The British Waterways Bill includes provisions for boat standards to be laid down. Hon. Members who are interested in that matter might like to pursue it with British Waterways as a part of its licensing procedures.

Mrs. Maddock: I am grateful to the Minister for that information, and I would be happy to support any efforts made in that direction.

Many of my constituents who live in park homes and mobile homes have problems with ever-rising bills and outgoings of all sorts, despite the fact that mobile homes are often some of the smallest homes. As we are tackling energy inefficiency in the Bill—many of the older mobile homes are among the most inefficient when it comes to energy—it is clearly right to include that category of residential property in the Bill. It also gives a very useful way of targeting many elderly people who are on low incomes.

In many ways, I believe that mobile homes should be easier to insulate than some homes built in traditional ways. I have heard about the problems people have had with insulating cavity walls, and so on. It makes sense to include mobile homes, and they are a useful extra target within the Bill.

I am extremely grateful to the Minister and his civil servants for their strenuous efforts to include the measure. I look forward to continued inventive contributions from Conservative Members on this matter, which is open to a great deal of invention, but I urge all Members to support this amendment for the sake of constituents who are living in the type of home which is perhaps the worst insulated.

Mr. Matthew Banks: I have the privilege to represent a seaside constituency, and many of my hon. Friends will be well aware that many mobile home dwellers live permanently in such accommodation, particularly in seaside resorts. I welcome the Government amendment, and I am sorry that—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) pointed out—it was not in the Bill originally. The amendment fulfils the commitment which my hon. Friend the Minister made in Committee, and that is widely welcomed by my hon. Friends.

There was some murmuring by hon. Members following the remark of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) about canal boats. Although my hon. Friend has a good sense of humour, the fact is that he raised a fair and pertinent point. While many people enjoy canal boats for recreational activities at weekend and on annual holidays, many people do live in them. I recognise, however, the difficulties of drafting an amendment that would include those individuals, but nevertheless I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister about the efforts that he has made in drafting this amendment. The amendment will cover England, Scotland, Wales and—most notably—Northern Ireland, where different rules apply.

All too often I have heard disparaging remarks—although not in this House—about those who live in mobile homes, but such homes do provide a permanent residence for many people. There are many more people who find that they live in them on a semi-permanent basis. As long as they are covered by the points in amendment No. 4, I see no reason why they should be disfranchised in any way from energy conservation.

The introduction of VAT on gas and electricity—while not done first and foremost for its revenue-raising capabilities, but to cut emissions—means that it is now more important to institute energy efficiency measures in permanent and mobile homes. Without this amendment, my constituents and hundreds, if not thousands, of others would not have the opportunity to be part of the energy conservation schemes which local authorities will be expected to fulfil.

The nature of mobile homes—particularly those in seaside resorts—is such that, while those who live in them may enjoy some warm and sunny weather in summer, they are open for much of the time to the elements and to poor weather. Regrettably, in the United Kingdom—whether one is in Christchurch, in Southport or in the constituency of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

(Mrs. Michie)—we have too much rain. Those who live in mobile homes in seaside resorts can be subjected to wind and, at times, to gales.

The opportunity for those people to have grants to insulate their properties—whether by pipe lagging, roof lagging or draught insulation—is very important. I find it rather surprising that that type of home was left out of the original Bill, particularly in view of the fact that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) suggested that she had spoken at great length with mobile home owners.

Mrs. Maddock: I hoped that I had made it clear that the measure was not included in the first place in a spirit of co-operation and in the hope of getting something on the statute book. Considerable time was given to discussing what the definition of a residential home should be, and hon. Members are lucky—as the Minister said—that we do not have a very long definition. The hon. Gentleman will know that the opportunity exists in Committee to get the Bill rather more as one would want it. That is why I asked the Minister about this amendment, and I hope that it will now get on the statute book.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for clarifying that point. She has conceded a great deal, because the Bill will not impose on local authorities a duty to set out a specific 30 per cent. improvement in domestic energy savings. That is a major concession, and it is likely to ensure that the Bill passes into law. The more advisory approach which the Bill will have—it will not have the teeth which the hon. Lady had originally intended—is important. I welcome the point that she has just made, and the advisory nature of a target of 30 per cent. is particularly important.

To return to the amendment, if we were to leave out mobile home dwellers, we would be disfranchising a significant proportion of the population. While there are relatively few mobile home dwellers in my constituency, those people have just as much right to be subject to energy conservation reports. I welcome the Government amendments, although for obvious reasons I shall not deal with amendment No. 3 which is merely a drafting measure. I welcome the commitment made by my hon. Friend the Minister in bringing forward this amendment which will improve the Bill considerably and which certainly underlines the commitment that my hon. Friend made in Committee.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) expresses surprise that mobile homes were not originally included in the Bill. I am not surprised. It is most unfortunate that most mobile home owners find themselves disfranchised in so much legislation, including fundamental legislation such as landlord and tenant protection measures. Most mobile homes are not mobile. Many are in parks and do not have wheels attached to them. They are as immobile as any other home.

I am pleased that the amendment has been tabled. I should like to see the spirit of involving mobile homes in legislation extended at some time in the future to landlord and tenant legislation.

Energy conservation is a two-way equation. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, there is the use of efficient products in the home such as efficient lighting, washing machines and so on. We seek to maximise the efficacy of a device while minimising the amount of energy that it uses. The other side of the equation is minimising the amount of heat or energy loss.

12 noon

Those of us who have done our O-level physics—perhaps some of us have even done A-level physics—know that energy, and in particular heat energy, is lost through convection, conduction and radiation. If ever there were a case of a particular environment losing heat through conduction, convection and radiation, it is the so-called mobile home.

A third part of the equation is ventilation. It is all very well insulating a home or mobile home to ensure that energy is not lost through convection. We must also ensure that there is no potential danger to the inhabitants of the home from insufficient or inefficient ventilation. That point particularly applies to mobile homes. That is why the energy conservation authorities could find their work cut out for them when it comes to advising mobile home owners. Such people have specific problems that need to be tackled. It is right and proper that they should be included in the Bill.

I mentioned narrow boats and house boats in an intervention. The matter was subsequently referred to by my hon. Friends and Opposition Members. I find it surprising that house boats have not been included in the scope of the Bill. Hon. Members will know that I have particularly attractive waterways in my constituency. The British Waterways Board took me on one of its narrow boats along the canal in my constituency near Shugborough.

If I may do so without moving too far away from the amendment, I should like to put in a quick plug for Shugborough and the narrow boat waterway near the home of the Earl of Lichfield. It is an attractive area in which to own a narrow boat. The point is that many people live on narrow boats and houseboats—for example on the River Thames. They, too, should have access to the advice which will be available from the energy conservation authorities if the Bill becomes law. Such people have the same problems as mobile home owners.

Another specific point is of prime importance. I have already mentioned the danger to mobile home owners of lack of ventilation. Although many people heat their homes with electric storage heaters or gas central heating, many people in mobile homes and, dare I say it, houseboats and canal boats heat their homes with paraffin heaters. Hon. Members who have ever been on a canal boat, lived in a caravan or been on holiday in a caravan will know that paraffin heaters are potentially very dangerous. I hope that the energy conservation authorities will make a point of advising mobile home owners on more efficient and safer forms of heating.

I will not press the need to expand the amendment to include narrow boats and houseboats. If I did, the whole amendment might fall. That is certainly not my intention. However, just as I hope that legislation in years to come such as landlord and tenant, commonhold and leasehold legislation might encompass protection for mobile home owners, so I hope that the Bill when it becomes an Act might be amended in future to include people who live on narrow boats and houseboats. It is an omission that needs to be remedied. Having said that, the amendment is wise and timely and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for tabling the amendment. When I first looked at the Bill, I was taken aback to see that mobile homes were excluded from it. The Bill has been promoted by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), who comes from, one might say, the caravan belt of England. Whereas in Southampton there are not many caravans, I should have thought that the hon. Lady would be well aware of caravans and would have included mobile homes in her Bill. She explained that the problem was one of definition of mobile homes.

I notice that the amendment would insert "a mobile home". It is not beyond the wit of anyone who introduces a Bill in the House to put a full stop after "mobile home" and hope that someone somewhere will subsequently define it, as my hon. Friend the Minister has done in an extremely able fashion.

My constituency of Gravesham in Kent is not one of the greatest holiday destinations in the country. Nevertheless, I recommend it to hon. Members, because it is a great riverside borough. We have many historical associations. Pocahontas died there. Charles Dickens lived up the road. General Gordon looked after our fort before departing to deal with other matters in Khartoum.

As there is not a great flood of tourists into Gravesham, one would not at first notice caravans around my borough, just as the hon. Member for Christchurch seems not to have noticed mobile homes around her constituency. As I know my constituency well, I know that there are quite a number of mobile homes—for instance, at Southfields Shaw in the parish of Meopham, where there are sizeable caravans, which, although mobile, are effectively immobilised by the residents.

Residents of mobile homes have considerable concerns about energy conservation, just as any householder does. The energy conservation schemes that we have discussed this morning are applicable to occupants of mobile homes. It does not require a great stretch of the imagination to understand why the take-up of home energy conservation grants and so on is low. Although an amateur in the matter of mobile homes, I have nevertheless noticed that most, if not all, do not have lofts in which owners can crawl around to put down the three inches of material to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) referred. As my hon. Friend pointed out, we need more than three inches in lofts, which are not to be found in caravans.

On a more serious point, I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to give some thought to applying home renovation grants to caravans. He might consider that in his deliberations and the review of home renovation grants that he is to carry out.

In conclusion, I certainly support the amendment. I admit that the definition is immensely short, in the light of what the Minister said. I, for one, have great confidence in his drafting powers and believe that the amendments that he has tabled fully cover the matter. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Christchurch has followed them up rapidly and given them her support.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), the more I hear the mutual congratulation that has been endemic throughout the debate, especially that on this amendment, the more uneasy I become. When I read the terms of the amendment, I also became increasingly uneasy.

My constituency is one of the most beautiful in the United Kingdom. As a result, at the end of the second world war and in the 1950s, people poured out of the black country and Birmingham and took advantage of the lax planning legislation by erecting mobile homes in the Walshes, Little Lakes, Redstone, and Kingsland caravan parks in my constituency and effectively living in them permanently—as my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) said—albeit that they are in the anomalous situation of having to leave their homes for one month in every year to comply with planning legislation. In due course, we must consider that.

It is estimated that there are upwards of 4,000 caravans and mobile homes in my constituency and, although I accept the argument that constituents who live in such accommodation should not be disfranchised as regards their home energy efficiency needs, I am very concerned that the amendment takes little account of the enormous extra cost that will be imposed on local authorities, such as Wyre Forest district council—which is already spending about £2 million above its standard spending assessment and therefore has to be capped—which will have to look into the home insulation and the energy needs of caravan and mobile home owners.

Although he is not in his place, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) was absolutely correct to say that a large proportion of the assumptions that have been made under home insulation legislation, home energy efficiency schemes and the grant regimes do not apply to mobile homes and caravans. For instance, I am told that the maximum grant available for loft insulation under the home energy efficiency scheme is £198.70. Many people who live in mobile homes do not have lofts, so such grants are not available to them. The maximum grant available for draught proofing is £128.50, but that also does not apply to many mobile homes to the same extent that it applies to conventional homes.

I am worried that, within the existing grant regime, there will be no possibility of fulfilling the expectations that will be aroused among my constituents who live in mobile homes about potential energy efficiency improvements that can be made as a result of the surveys. We shall have a triumph of good intentions over achievement.

As has been rightly said, the insulation problems of mobile home owners are far greater than those of people in conventional homes. They will expect something to be done about that. Many of them live on very low incomes and will be eligible for the grants, but they will be told that the maximum grant available under the HEES is £305. Given the amount of work that is required for many of those draughty, poorly insulated and rather elderly caravans and mobile homes, with respect, £305 will go absolutely nowhere.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Will my hon. Friend consider that argument carefully? It seems to me that the amount of money that he mentioned would go a considerable way to assist owners of mobile homes for whom those are their permanent residence. I accept that the Bill will raise expectations that we may not be able to meet—it is a great trait of the Liberal Democrats—but the amount of money

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

that he mentioned would, if it were available, go quite a long way towards protecting someone in a small mobile home against the elements to which I referred in my remarks.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend has obviously not seen the condition of many of the mobile homes in my constituency. I am sorry to have to say that not only will £305 not go far towards producing the sort of results that we would want for constituents in mobile homes but, more fundamentally, the categories under which the HEES operates are not appropriate to mobile homes—for instance, loft insulation and draught proofing.

Mr. Hendry: The gist of my hon. Friend's argument appears to be that because people will not be able to do everything that they might wish with the grants, it is better that they should do nothing. That does not seem terribly helpful to the people whom we are seeking to assist.

12.15 pm

Mr. Coombs: If we approve the amendment and thereby apply energy surveys to mobile homes and caravans, it is only fair on those of my constituents who live in them that we consider the grant regime to ensure that it is relevant to their conditions. If we do not do so, we shall arouse their expectations, and inevitably fail them.

The Minister is slotting the amendment into the Bill very late in the day. Is he prepared to review the way in which the HEES works in so far as it applies to mobile homes, to ensure that it is appropriate and that the overall grant available is sufficient, given the significant energy needs of people living in mobile homes compared with those of people living in conventional houses?

Mr. Merchant: I shall be brief, because some rather heavy weather is being made of this amendment. I can see the reason for it—to enable the Bill to cover as many types of residential accommodation as possible and, if it is to have any meaning, it should be extended as widely as possible. From the point of view of principle, and the technical point of view, it is sensible to include the provision and the proper definition.

Having said that, I hardly think that the next time that the world's Heads of State meet to discuss global climate change they will be exercised by whether mobile homes in Britain are fully insulated. I doubt that it makes that much difference to total carbon dioxide emissions.

As for the cost of including mobile homes in the assessments that local authorities will have to carry out, I hardly think that that will make much difference, either. Most of the surveys carried out under the provisions of the Bill will be based on samples. I imagine that the marginal cost of including mobile homes in that sample is so minimal as not to show on any set of accounts.

I have two brief reasons for supporting the amendment. The first is one that some hon. Members have mentioned, but it deserves repetition. Mobile homes are some of the most energy-wasteful types of residence around. Many are old and need to be examined for the sake of the occupants to ensure that the most modern systems are in place. It need not necessarily cost a lot of money to put into effect remedial work on mobile homes and to bring about a considerable saving in energy costs.

That leads me naturally on to the second point, which is that some of the people who live in mobile homes are among the least well-off in our community. They are the fuel poor in many cases and the elderly, who need greater heat and are therefore paying proportionately far more than they need to, to heat themselves. For that reason, it is important to include mobile homes in the scope of the Bill. Clearly, those people, for their own good, need the best help, advice and remedial measures available to improve their standard of living.

Mobile homes are included in the energy efficiency scheme so it seems sensible that they should be included in the Bill. There needs to be a clear definition of mobile homes because we do not want to include people's holiday caravans; that would be going into the realms of the absurd. The definition sensibly draws a line between a mobile home that is a residence and one that is not. For those reasons, I support the amendment, and I hope that it is incorporated in the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), I think that the amendment, although sensible in itself, begins to shed some true light on the Bill. It is a perfectly unexceptionable Bill. It is a Bill about good intentions, but it will achieve virtually nothing. That can be seen in terms of mobile homes. My hon. Friend made an excellent speech, in which he explained some of the problems that will occur, especially with regard to mobile homes.

I represent a rural constituency in quite a nice part of the country where there are many mobile homes, so I am well aware of the problems. There are mobile homes especially in sites along the River Trent, around Torksey, which tend to be newer mobile homes. At Binbrook on the Wolds, near where I live, there is a large site for mobile homes; some are quite old. As my hon. Friend said, some of the insulation problems of the old mobile homes are great. People do not have to produce a great deal of heat to keep themselves cosy in their mobile home; they are not heating the atmosphere to any great extent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) said, the Heads of State at Rio will not be very concerned about the heat produced. However, an awful amount of heat is being wasted.

I can imagine the officials in West Lindsey district council, to whom I have referred several times, racking their brains. How could they have the expertise or knowledge, without expending considerable resources, to determine how to solve the problems of mobile home dwellers in Binbrook, who have homes where draughts come in and out? Even if the officials did determine how to solve the problems, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest asked, what grants would be available? By definition, none of the mobile homes has a loft, a point that has been made once or twice in this short debate.

Motions will be gone through at the guild hall in West Lindsey. Reports will be written and committees will sit. Many of my mobile home owners are on low incomes. If they were not on low incomes, they would presumably live in a proper home; I am not trying to denigrate mobile homes. However, many people who live in mobile homes would rather live in a proper home. Other mobile home dwellers, especially around Torksey, are retired people who live there for two or three months a years.

Mobile homes are a cheap form of accommodation in the summer months. Retired people can then spend time in the south of Spain in the winter. It is very pleasant. Such people will not be very worried about what the worthy officials in West Lindsey are saying as they produce their earnest reports which, no doubt, will gather dust. Even if the reports suggest anything useful, grants will not be available to do anything very useful.

We go round in circles. We shall end up with a Bill which the House will pass, presumably, in a couple of hours after we have concluded lengthy discussions on it. Nothing very useful will be done for the poor people sitting in draughty mobile homes in Binbrook.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): My first point relates to guidance under clause 4. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware that the building regulations are about to be amended so that the builder or architect of all new houses will be required to furnish an efficiency rating—a standard assessment procedure or SAP rating—to which the other forms of energy efficiency scales can be converted.

There is, however, no such requirement for caravans. That is an omission. When one buys a new mobile home, one will not be able to get any idea of its energy efficiency. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider, when he issues guidance to local authorities, whether they could give an idea of the scale of energy efficiency that mobile homes should be expected to reach. Clearly, they will not be able to reach the same standard as domestic dwellings. It might, however, be useful for my hon. Friend to say what standard he expects.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend think that there is a corollary here? My hon. Friend the Minister spoke about the British Waterways Board possibly setting down standards and grading the energy efficiency of canal boats and houseboats. Could there not be a similar scheme, as my hon. Friend said, for mobile homes?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful for that intervention because it brings me to my second point—the question of canal boats. I was a member of the Committee which sat for well over a year studying the British Waterways Bill. As my hon. Friend the Minister made clear, the Committee spent days and weeks on the question of design standards. One of the things about canal boats about which the Committee was concerned—this applies to caravans as well—was fire safety. It would be remiss of us, when debating the amendment at such length, not to mention fire safety. The temptation in energy efficiency terms may be to seal or block windows so that they cannot be opened. That could create a considerable fire hazard—

Mr. Fabricant: And fumes.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: As my hon. Friend says, fumes are also a problem. If there is no adequate ventilation in a caravan or canal boat, there can be a build-up of carbon monoxide and people can be poisoned and killed while they sleep. There have been numerous instances. Fire safety is important. A balance must be struck between energy efficiency and fire safety in mobile homes.

My local authority has taken a rigorous attitude to fire safety in mobile homes, much to the distress of many of my constituents who have added porches and wooden garden sheds. My hon. Friend the Minister will need to give guidance to local authorities about the level of energy efficiency that they would expect for mobile homes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) commented on the level of grants available for energy efficiency schemes. Although £300 may not seem a lot of money in terms of energy efficiency measures, some measures that can be taken have a dramatic effect for a fairly cheap price. For example, an insulation jacket on a hot water cylinder can dramatically cut the energy costs of heating water.

I plead with my hon. Friend not to be too dismissive of the small levels of grant available, because for those living in the worst conditions in mobile homes, or in older housing stock, such grants can be a lifeline. I thoroughly endorse the home energy efficiency scheme and I also praise my right hon. Friend for extending that scheme. I hope that some mobile home owners will be able to take advantage of it.

Mr. Hendry: The outside world looking in on our debate today would be bemused and, indeed, impressed by the extent to which hon. Members can talk about mobile homes, narrow boats and other such places where people live. Perhaps the most useful fact gleaned this morning is that General Gordon started his life and Queen Pocahontas ended her days in mobile homes in Gravesend. Hon. Members may not previously have been aware of that.

The key to the amendment is that there is a fundamental difference between those homes that are relatively immobile and those that are mobile. It is reasonable to extend the provisions of the Bill to cover those that are relatively immobile and are likely to be permanent homes, but it is not reasonable to extend it to cover those homes that are likely to move round all over the place. In that second category I include not just general caravans—there is no reason for the Bill to apply to them—but canal boats. In that sense, I must disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant).

If the Bill relates to permanent housing stock, some people may live on a canal boat permanently. There is perhaps a difference perhaps between a houseboat and a canal boat. Those which are predominantly used for tourism and leisure and which go up and down canals during the day are not lived in; there is therefore no reason why they should be covered by the Bill.

12.30 pm

Mr. Fabricant: I do not agree with the logic of my hon. Friend's argument that a mobile home may not be a permanent one. Some people live permanently on canal boats. What is more relevant to the amendment, Romanies, travellers or whatever they choose to call themselves, live permanently in caravans, but yet are mobile. Is my hon. Friend suggesting, that although those people live permanently in such homes, they should not be included within the scope of the Bill?

Mr. Hendry: A practical difficulty arises because we are considering the requirement of a duty on a local authority. A canal boat or a caravan, which are genuinely mobile, can be easily moved, so it is difficult to expect a local authority to give any guidance on the insulation of such dwellings. One day such a home could be in that

[Mr. Hendry]

authority's patch; the next day it could be 100 yards outside it and the following week it could be halfway around the country.

Mr. Leigh: One of the problems with the Bill is that resources are not available for its purpose. The House would not support a general audit of individual houses, mobile homes, canal boats or whatever, so only general samples will be taken. I do not believe that a local authority could possibly know where my hon. Friend's canal boat was at any time. The samples taken will be so general and the information gathered so generalised that I suspect that the information received by the local authority, and therefore the information dispersed by it, will be fairly valueless.

Mr. Hendry: My hon. Friend has made my point far more eloquently and less confusingly than I had tried to do. Houseboats and canal boats should be excluded from the scope of the Bill because they can move round all over the place. Mobile homes can be included within the Bill because, by their very nature, they will not change site on every other day of the week. A fundamental difference can be made between those types of dwelling.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is right to say that the key point is the mobility of caravans and canal boats, should it be deemed to include them within the Bill. The Private Bill Committee considering the British Waterways Bill spent weeks and weeks trying to tighten the licensing system to differentiate precisely between houseboats and pleasure boats. Does my hon. Friend agree that my hon. Friend the Minister could deal with that difference in guidance under clause 4 to include houseboats which are static? In certain parts of London and elsewhere, many people live in such boats permanently, some of them in pretty lowly conditions.

Mr. Hendry: I hope that they are not too lowly, which would presumably mean that they have sunk. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear my hon. Friend's point in mind when he responds to the debate.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his generosity in giving way. I agree with my hon. Friends that it would be difficult, indeed impossible, for a local authority to conduct an audit of mobile homes, whether they are located on canals, rivers or on land. Surely the main function of the energy conservation authority would be to act as a source of information to which a home owner could go? It is therefore not primarily a burden on the authority to seek out the home owner; it is the home owner who will seek out the authority. Therefore, the restriction to which my hon. Friend referred would not apply.

Mr. Hendry: Nevertheless, there is a difficulty. The owner of the said houseboat, having moved from one council to another council, goes into the council's office the following week, having been into one in a different authority the week before, and asks for some advice. One cannot give people the right to travel throughout the country, visiting every local authority, asking for advice about insulating their houseboat or caravan and asking for a grant to improve the insulation.

Mr. Fabricant: Why not?

Mr. Hendry: Because the owner would obtain £305 from Mid-Staffordshire and then travel a bit further along the canal and obtain a £305 grant from another council, and would obtain £305 from every authority that has a canal in the country. That becomes unworkable. I am sure that my hon. Friend, with his traditional wisdom, will understand that as he reflects on the debate.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has misunderstood the position. The licensing provisions of British Waterways are clear. A boat that is static and is used for full-time residential use is a houseboat; a canal boat that moves is a pleasure boat. There are two different licensing systems.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification.

There is a second key aspect to the amendment. The Bill, if it is to be relevant, must relate to what is appropriate housing and appropriate accommodation in different parts of the country. For reasons that I outlined earlier, it becomes evident that we shall not have many mobile homes in High Peak because the hypothermia will be too great, and that there are other parts of the country, such as Christchurch, where a mobile home is a much more favoured form of accommodation. If the Bill is to be applicable to different parts of the country, it is right that what is a typical form of accommodation in each place should be incorporated in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Minister, when replying to the debate about amendment No. 2, said that I was right to note that, in my constituency, there are many small, old houses which, by their nature, will be draughty. He said that that was one of the reasons why the Bill would be important to High Peak. If that is what makes it important to High Peak, the fact that there are many mobile homes in other constituencies in other parts of the country is a reason why they should be incorporated, to ensure that the Bill is relevant to them.

I regret having to disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs). My hon. Friend is usually a beacon of common sense and good judgment. This morning he has strayed a little bit from that. His argument that one should not make advice available to people because the grant has been set at a level that will not enable them to do everything is fundamentally flawed.

The £305 to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest referred is the maximum for any form of accommodation, and that £305 will do much more in helping in the insulation of a mobile home, to make a much more fundamental difference to the quality of life of the people living there than it could if it were spent on insulating a two or three-bedroomed house. It is fundamentally wrong to rule people out on the grounds that they would not be able to do all the work they wish, because it means that many people who can benefit from the grant system would not be able to do so.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I should make it plain, in the nicest possible way, that what may be flawed is the analysis of my argument by my hon. Friend the Member

for High Peak (Mr. Hendry). My argument was not that we should reject amendment No. 3, but that, if we make it, there is every reason to say that the HEES should be reconsidered, in terms of the maximum provision that it makes, given the greater needs that the hon. Gentleman has identified for people living in mobile homes and caravans so far as insulation is concerned, and in terms of the detail of its operation. For instance, we mentioned loft insulation and discussed whether that was appropriate for people who live in mobile homes, in which lofts are often significant by their absence.

Mr. Hendry: Self-evidently, if there is no loft, one should not be given loft insulation grants—although undoubtedly there will be Labour authorities around the country who will grant them, because they have provided money for repairing flats that had been knocked down years previously. However, that is in the ambit of local government.

But I think that my hon. Friend's argument remains incorrect. I would be surprised if he were calling for an increase in Government expenditure to extend the home energy efficiency scheme. He is always a beacon of common sense, he is also always a guardian of public expenditure. I do not believe that he would push for a massive increase to extend the scheme—

Mr. Coombs *rose—*

Mr. Hendry: My hon. Friend may be about to correct me.

Mr. Coombs: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's point, but if he looks at the categories available for grant under the scheme, he will see that the scheme applies less potently to people in mobile homes and caravans than to those with conventional houses. We have already agreed on loft insulation; it may well be that the lagging of hot water tanks would be relevant to both sorts of homes, but to a lesser extent to mobile homes. Draught stripping and corking, and improved heating controls, may apply to both sorts of homes. What is not included in the list, but would be needed in mobile homes, is cavity wall insulation. That is most important in a mobile home but is not, as I understand it, allowed for in the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Hendry: I understand my hon. Friend's point. The key is that the grant can make life significantly more comfortable. It can be used to insulate doors and windows to prevent a significant amount of the heat loss that would otherwise occur. The £305 can make a significant contribution to, or cover the full cost of, such work. I accept my hon. Friend's point that the amount will not cover everything, but to suggest that we should not agree to the amendment because it would not allow for everything would be wrong. I understand my hon. Friend's point and I hope that we have, as ever, established some clarity and cohesion between the two of us.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Hendry: I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) wishes to make yet another minor intervention.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to me again. I want to clarify two points that I raised in my earlier interventions. My hon. Friend has said that my argument that a mobile home—albeit a permanent dwelling—should not be included within the scope of the Bill is because a mobile home owner would be able to travel from area to area—my hon. Friend is shaking his head in disagreement, but I think that if he checks *Hansard* he will see that that is precisely what he said—to obtain grants from different authorities. But clause 6(1) of the Bill states:

"Nothing in this Act shall be taken as conferring—

(a) any power to make grants or loans;

(b) any power of entry"

Since my earlier interventions when I was stunned into silence by my hon. Friend's reply, which was as erudite as ever—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am stunning the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) into silence now, as his intervention is far too long. I should also prefer to see the hon. Gentleman's front rather than his back.

Mr. Hendry: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for bringing us back to order.

The point that I was making and which my hon. Friend appears to have misunderstood is that there is a fundamental difference between those homes that are relatively immobile and those which, by definition, are wholly mobile. It is right to differentiate between the two. I believe that those homes which the amendment classifies as mobile homes are pretty static and unlikely to be moved without significant effort—unlike canal boats, which can be moved around the country at will.

We have had a full debate on the subject, which I have pushed significantly further than I intended due to the interventions to which I have sought to respond. I shall leave my contribution there.

Ms Ruddock: I was inclined at the start of the debate not to speak in it, but simply to support the amendment. Clearly, on grounds of social equity, people living in what we all consider to be permanent mobile homes should be entitled to the same services, attention and consideration as those living in more traditional structures. Having heard the debate and the many exchanges between Conservative Members, I feel inclined to say a few words.

I hope that the Minister will be able to clarify the sort of information and advice that he believes it will be possible to give to mobile home owners under the Bill's provisions. If people who live in mobile homes are encouraged to think about home insulation and energy efficiency, they may do work themselves which will affect their safety. For example, they may create a fire risk. Local authorities must provide expert advice and gather information about mobile homes because generally they will have little knowledge of the condition of mobile homes in their areas.

My constituency is in the heart of the inner city, where there are only a small number of mobile homes. However, when I lived in the Newbury constituency a significant number of people lived in that kind of accommodation.

Mr. Hendry: On Greenham common?

12.45 pm

Ms Ruddock: I assure the Minister that I am not referring to those who were camped on Greenham

[Ms Ruddock]

common in tents or in other accommodation. I visited many of the people who lived in mobile homes in designated areas and I became aware of the poor levels of insulation in those dwellings. Many such people had low disposable incomes and were deeply concerned about the high fuel charges that they were forced to pay.

Proper attention must be given to those who live in mobile homes. Local authorities must understand their peculiar situation and they must provide expert advice to allow those people to join in the existing energy efficiency schemes or those which may be introduced in the future. I suspect that it may be more difficult to provide the appropriate assistance to those people. However, as a number of Conservative Members have said, we should not draw back from providing even a little advice and assistance under the Bill.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: With the leave of the House, I shall speak again.

In a sense, this debate is a re-run of parts of the previous debate. There was no shortage of advice offered to me, to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) or to those who will be affected by the amendment. As the hon. Lady was in and out of the Chamber during the debate, I must inform her that, in addition to her constituency being described as the "Riviera of England", it was called the "caravan belt of England". In the next debate it will no doubt be described as the "Athens of the Dorset coast", or something equally excessive.

The hon. Lady knows that energy conservation is an important issue for those who live in mobile homes. I have enjoyed a long association with the Beech Park site at Wigginton and I am the honorary president of its residents association. I enjoy nothing more than attending the local dance at the Tring football club when I am able to do so.

Quite a number of elderly people and those on low incomes settle in mobile home parks, perhaps as a result of divorce or bereavement, and we are anxious to see practical advice and assistance provided to them. The hon. Member for Deptford asked me what sort of advice would be provided. Of course, there will be a range of advice—some of which can be provided at no cost.

For example, advice about closing curtains at night applies to those who live in mobile homes and permanent dwellings. I keep ramming home that point, but I still see large numbers of uncurtained windows at night. Advice can be provided about energy efficient equipment that people can buy. The home energy efficiency scheme applies equally to mobile home owners and to those who live in permanent structures.

Mobile home owners can take advantage of that scheme in the form of draught proofing and tank lagging. I accept that, as they do not have lofts, they cannot take advantage of loft insulation schemes. However, I am happy to review the HEES scheme to see whether other appropriate measures might applied to mobile homes, whose needs are different from those of other dwellings.

I have had discussions with a number of local authorities which are concerned about the concentration of mobile home sites in their areas. In the context of our overall review of home renovation policy, I shall also re-examine the minor works assistance grants to see whether they are relevant to the problems raised by many hon. Members.

We should not labour under the misapprehension that all mobile homes are in seaside towns. The hon. Member for Deptford said that there were one or two in her constituency. They are, indeed, widely scattered around the country but nothing in the Bill affects the planning regime. I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) that it is in no sense a separate recognition of the status of such homes. However, I think that hon. Members generally believe that those who have mobile homes as their permanent residence should be able to get advice and assistance.

I now deal with boats, in which of course I have an interest. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) hit the nail on the head when he referred to fire safety standards and the licensing regime applied by British Waterways to boats on its waters. That system is, of course, replicated on other waterways.

I do not think that most canal boats are energy inefficient because of their wooden structure and the fact that their windows are small in comparison with the general surface area. I suspect that they might turn out to be more energy efficient than many permanent and non-moored homes. In any case, it is simply not possible to apply the Bill's provisions to them. How is a local authority to draw up a strategy for boats which might well move from place to place during the year? When they retire, many pensioners choose to spend a few years sailing around the country, spending a few weeks here and there. There are practical difficulties in including boats in the Bill's provisions.

In general, the House has welcomed the inclusion of mobile homes. I hope that what I have said about the grant regime will have assisted hon. Members to develop an enthusiasm that some did not have before and a belief that the Bill is about achievement, not fine words. That has always been my approach to the Bill. I told the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) some time ago that I hoped to do better than his Bill, and that is what we are trying to do.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 4, in page 1, line 16, at end insert ', or

(b) a mobile home, that is—

(i) in England and Wales or Scotland, a caravan within the meaning of Part I of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 (disregarding the amendment made by section 13(2) of the Caravan Sites Act 1968) which is a dwelling for the purposes of Part I or II of the Local Government Finance Act 1992,

(ii) in Northern Ireland, a caravan within the meaning of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 which is a dwelling-house for the purposes of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.'.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

Clause 2

Energy Conservation Reports

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 13, leave out 'the authority's policy' and insert

'any policy of the authority'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 6, in page 2, line 14, leave out from 'power' to 'in' in line 15.

No. 7, in page 2, line 16, leave out 'that' and insert 'any'.

Mr. Jones: These are minor amendments in fulfilment of an undertaking given in Committee. They would make it clear that an energy conservation authority was required to include in its report a statement of any policy it had for taking into account the personal circumstances of any person in deciding whether to exercise any power in connection with the energy conservation measures set out in its report rather than merely a statement of its policy for taking account of personal circumstances in exercising any power to make grants or loans. Clause 2 as it stands requires such a statement only in relation to powers to make grants or loans.

Amendment No. 5 would broaden the language of clause 2(3)(c) to ensure that a report included a statement of any policy that an authority had for taking into account an individual's personal circumstances in deciding whether to exercise any power in connection with energy conservation measures. That is a consequence of broadening the provision to go beyond powers to make grants and loans.

Amendment No. 6 would remove the specific statement of powers to make grants and loans, thus ensuring that the amendment was more wide-ranging, as the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) wished.

Amendment No. 7 would further widen the provision to cover the personal circumstances of any person, not just a person to whom a grant or loan was made. Of course, it may be the personal circumstances of someone other than the householder to which an authority would wish to give particular consideration—for example, where a household includes someone with disabilities, or a frail, elderly person.

Energy conservation measures can be particularly important to those with above average heating needs because of age, disability or illness, and I know that many organisations representing such people support the Bill. The HEES programme has always been directed at those with special needs because of low income. I am pleased that it is now available to all aged over 60.

Like other hon. Members, I have received a large volume of correspondence in relation to the Bill—one letter this morning was addressed to me as the Chancellor of the Exchequer—citing the benefits that it will bring, particularly to the elderly. Elderly people can be particularly daunted by the prospect of identifying and arranging for energy-saving measures in their homes, but, as we all know, there may be comparatively simple measures that could be taken that could contribute significantly to their health and comfort.

On a number of occasions during the passage of the Bill, hon. Members referred to their concerns about the effect of cold homes on elderly people. I hope that authorities will look particularly carefully at what they can do to target advice and information to those who most need it, as well as including in their reports appropriate policies for taking personal circumstances into account when exercising their powers in connection with energy efficiency measures.

By requiring a statement of any policy for giving priority to take account of personal circumstances, the amendments will ensure that local authorities address the question of whether to give priority, where their powers permit, even if they have not had such a policy in the past. What the nature of any policy should be will, of course, be a judgment for each authority to make, but requiring a statement of relevant policies in energy conservation reports will ensure that the judgment is out in the open.

I hope that the amendments will ensure that the case for giving priority to those with particular needs, who may in the past have been defined as "fuel poor", is addressed specifically by each energy conservation authority. Resources are, of course, finite and judgments will have to be made as to where they can do most good, but the amendments should ensure that proper consideration is given to the needs of the poor, the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities.

I believe that the amendments will be welcomed by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) and, indeed, the whole House, and that they meet the concerns that she expressed in Committee. I commend them to the House.

Mrs. Maddock: I welcome the amendments. I welcome amendment No. 6 enthusiastically, but am a little unsure as to why in Committee the Minister's original new clause referred only to local authorities' policies for taking personal circumstances into account when dealing with grants and loans, and not in dealing with other aspects of policy, such as education and advice. Indeed, I expressed concern about that in Committee.

I still have a slight worry about amendment No. 5. I have read it a number of times and have concluded that it can be considered as slightly strengthening or slightly weakening the Bill. It is strengthening if one reads it as extending the scope of the statements on policies of local authorities on targeting people on the basis of personal circumstances, but there is always a slight danger, if one reads it another way, that perhaps it is removing the implication that is currently contained in the Bill—that every energy conservation authority should have such a policy. I welcome the Minister's statement about the amendment, as he has clarified a matter about which I was concerned.

It is important that the amendment is not seen by local councils as letting them off the hook on one of the central contents of their reports, which many supporters of the Bill—local councils and many other organisations—were keen to see in it. If and when the Bill is implemented, I hope that local authorities will have clear policies on how they can target the fuel poor, as that is a matter about which many people, including hon. Members and many of the people who came to London yesterday in support of the Bill, feel strongly.

It is important that the Bill is implemented. I hope that the Minister will be strong on these matters.

1 pm

Mr. Fabricant: I welcome the amendment. Hon. Members will be aware that I am keen on glasnost. I would support a freedom of information Act, albeit combined with a privacy Act. The two are not mutually exclusive: one deals with intrusion into people's personal lives for trivial reasons and the other deals with acquiring information that should be in the public domain.

[Mr. Fabricant]

Quite clearly, the purpose of the amendments is to put the policy of the energy conservation authorities into the public domain. As my hon. Friend the Minister has already said, it is one thing to consider the judgments that the energy conservation authorities might make, but quite another to see the basis on which those judgments are made. We can make that kind of analysis only if the amendments are accepted.

It is tremendously important that the personal circumstances of the people who might benefit from the Bill by receiving advice are taken into account. In an earlier debate, reference was made to extending the scope of the Bill to people who live in mobile homes. Many people who live in mobile homes have restricted personal circumstances. Through the exercise of the amendments, we will be able to see the criteria by which energy conservation authorities will consider the problem raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and others about the peculiar circumstances of people who live in mobile homes. For that reason, I welcome the amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 2, line 14, leave out from 'power' to 'in' in line 15.

No. 7, in page 2, line 16, leave out 'that' and insert 'any'.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

Clause 3

FUNCTIONS OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE IN RELATION TO REPORTS

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 3, line 5, at end insert—

'(4) The Secretary of State shall from time to time prepare a report on—

(a) the progress made by energy conservation authorities in implementing the measures set out in reports prepared under section 2, and

(b) any steps he has taken pursuant to subsection (2)(b) above,

and shall lay any such report before Parliament.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 9, in clause 5, page 3, line 20, leave out 'and (3)' and insert 'to (4)'.

Mr. Jones: Amendment No. 8 would require the Secretary of State from time to time to prepare and lay before Parliament a report on the progress made by energy conservation authorities in implementing the measures set out in their energy conservation reports and on the steps taken by the Secretary of State under subsection 3(2)(b) to assist with, and encourage others to assist with, measures listed in reports.

Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 are consequential.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must point out to the Minister that amendment No. 10 is being dealt with separately.

Mr. Jones: Amendment No. 9 is consequential and it ensures that the new duty would apply to measures in further or modified reports prepared under clause 5.

The amendments also stem from discussions in Committee. I understand the wish of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) that there should be regular reporting to Parliament of progress made under the Bill's provisions so that authorities' achievements can be judged. I recognise that there will be a desire to make comparisons, and it would be my intention that the form of reports would allow for that.

Hon. Members who served on the Committee which considered the Bill will recall that we had a considerable debate about how energy saving targets should be set. The Committee accepted my view that that could best be done through the guidance to be issued under clause 4. The reports envisaged by the amendments will also enable authorities' success in meeting those targets to be assessed, and this will no doubt be of considerable interest.

I am, however, anxious not to be too bureaucratic and burdensome. I hope, therefore, that reports to be prepared under the new subsection will be able to draw on factual information provided by energy conservation authorities.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Christchurch and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed have added their names to the amendment which incorporates one tabled by them referring to a duty for the Secretary of State to report on the steps that he had taken under clause 3(2)(b).

It is also right that the Secretary of State should be accountable for the steps that he has taken under the Bill, and I see no difficulty in including in a report a statement of what he has done under subsection 3(2)(b) to assist with, or to encourage others to assist with, measures set out in energy conservation authorities' reports. However, it is the implementation of the measures set out in the reports energy conservation authorities will draw up under clause 2, already covered by amendment No. 6, which will be the key to the achievement of the Bill's aims.

In drawing up guidance under clause 4 we shall need to consider what form the reports by the Secretary of State should take so that we can harmonise that with what authorities are asked to prepare. We shall of course need to discuss with the local authority associations how monitoring and reporting of progress should best be undertaken.

Obvious possibilities are progress towards the energy saving target adopted by the authority in accordance with the guidance that I have undertaken that we shall give on this point, or progress in improving the SAP rating of properties. Encouraging progress is being made towards developing more streamlined SAP ratings, which should in turn make low-cost housing stock profiling easier.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Is my hon. Friend saying that local authorities across the board will be set the objective of achieving a 30 per cent. saving, or will the authorities be able to set their own targets?

Mr. Jones: No, we shall set a target, but clearly, if a local authority has achieved a great deal in the past, or if its stock was already of a high energy efficiency character, it can perfectly well say to us that different criteria should apply in its different circumstances. Equally, we may wish to move the targets over a period of years according to the direction in which our international commitments lead us; or we may wish to set targets in terms not of percentages but of minimum SAP ratings, or of percentages of stock below a certain level. That is the reasoning behind the flexibility of approach. We are still trying to achieve a target, but not in quite such a rigid way as was originally envisaged.

Looking at SAP ratings has the advantage that it concentrates on what is important—the performance of the building in converting the energy used into useful heat and light.

Whatever the outcome of discussions with the local authority associations, I take the point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch in Committee that some form of comparison would be desirable. We must, however, be cautious of creating a major bureaucratic task. It must be borne in mind that every energy conservation authority in the United Kingdom will provide reports to the Secretary of State.

A report to Parliament based on detailed and necessarily subjective analysis of each one would not, I suggest, be of much use to the House, and drawing it up would not be the best use of the time of officials in the energy efficiency office in my Department. I believe that a succinct overview of the national situation, built up from objective evidence from individual authorities and enabling their performances to be compared, will meet the legitimate aspirations of Parliament and public for information on what is being achieved.

We must not forget, either, that such action will be useful in relation to our international obligations, such as those arising from the Earth summit in Rio. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Eggar) made an important announcement last week following a review of the prospects for future energy use in the United Kingdom and of associated emissions of carbon dioxide.

That showed that the United Kingdom can be confident of meeting its commitment to reduce carbon emissions, and indeed that we can expect to exceed it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that although there have been some changes in the relative contributions expected in the various elements of the climate change programme, we must continue to seek further cost-effective ways of reducing carbon emissions.

Energy use in the home is, of course, an important element in the achievement of those targets. Over a quarter of our carbon dioxide emissions come from energy used in the home—7.5 tonnes each year from the average home. With that in mind, identifying progress made in implementing energy conservation reports prepared under the Bill will provide a useful input to the monitoring of our international commitments.

Although I hesitate to speak on matters relating to Ireland on St. Patrick's day even more than on other days, I should at this juncture also set out the reasoning behind amendment No. 10, which we shall consider a little later. It provides that the reference to the laying of energy conservation reports before Parliament in clause 3(4)(b) should, in relation to Northern Ireland, be a reference to laying before the Northern Ireland Assembly—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That should be considered when we deal with the next amendment.

Mr. Jones: I shall do that, Madam Deputy Speaker, but—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry if the Minister will have to alter his brief, but that is not the concern of the Chair.

Mr. Jones: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that I might be able to save the House some time.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: This amendment is crucial to those of us who are concerned that the Bill may be stronger in intention and aspiration than on achievement, because it is only through this clause—which has been belatedly put in the Bill—that Parliament will be informed not only as to what individual local authorities intend to do so in relation to home energy efficiency measures, but what they achieve.

I should like to press the Minister on one or two matters. He said earlier that, although it was not specifically mentioned in the Bill, the cost of assessing home energy efficiency needs for local authorities would be uppermost in his mind when he instructs authorities on further ways in which they should carry out schemes, and also when he reports to Parliament. He said that the compliance cost assessment which applies to every other piece of legislation that the Government are now putting forward would also apply effectively to this Bill.

My hon. Friend must accept that one or two of us are very cynical as to the estimates of the cost of this legislation. It has been said that the maximum that such legislation could cost is approximately £40,000 for each average-sized district council, making a total of about £23 million throughout the United Kingdom. Many people—particularly Opposition Members, who seem to spend other people's money as if it were going out of fashion—might say, "What is £23 million among friends?" I happen to think that £23 million is an enormous amount of money. When my hon. Friend comes to prepare his reports to Parliament, he should major on the important item of compliance cost assessment and on how effective is the information—albeit on a sample basis—which local authorities are getting when they carry out their surveys.

On that second point, I should be slightly concerned if the Minister felt—as he implied earlier in the debate—that, just because an area may have a lot of modern housing and therefore, in terms of energy efficiency, may be further advanced than those areas with older housing, necessarily the costs of assessing the energy efficiency of those houses would be any less. Obviously, it is the relative position of the houses and their efficiency which are important. That is why my hon. Friend rightly resisted in Committee a 30 per cent. reduction target across the board. The costs must be assessed, irrespective of how efficient the housing authority may be in the first instance.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I was not trying to suggest that the cost of assessment would be less, but that the target was less relevant because of the position houses were in.

Mr. Coombs: I entirely accept that.

The Bill seems to be framed—particularly clause 2 and subsections (3) and (4)—in terms of assessing the cost of energy conservation measures, assessing the extent by which carbon dioxide emissions would be decreased as a result of the measures, assessing the number of jobs which would result from the implementation of the measures and assessing the average savings on fuel bills which might be expected to result from the measures. All these are anticipated.

If the information that the Minister gives Parliament is to mean anything at all, not only do local authorities have to carry out the kind of projects itemised in subsections (3) and (4), but they must tell the Secretary of State what has been done and what achievements have been made. That, I submit, is a completely different exercise. It involves audit of properties on which home insulation work has been done and assessment of the subsequent

[Mr. Coombs]

reduction in fuel bills and of energy efficiency. It also involves significant liaison with the private sector, which will carry out much of the work.

I suspect that, to the estimated £40,000 for each local authority for the original task of assessing aspiration and potential commitment, should be added the inspection system that local authorities will need to put in place to determine what has been achieved in practice. I worry that the cost could easily be double the estimate of £40,000 per authority. It could easily go up to £100,000. So the total cost to the nation of this measure, well intentioned though it is and effective as it might be, could be about £100 million rather than the £23 million that has been estimated so far.

1.15 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: In considering the amendment and the reports that will have to be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State, will my hon. Friend consider clause 7(b), which refers to:

"any increase attributable to this Act in the sums payable out of such moneys under any other Act."

So whatever money is to be spent under the Bill—my hon. Friend has mentioned an amount somewhere between £23 million and £100 million—will be squeezed from some other local authority budget.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend makes a good point. That is all the more reason why the aspirations and achievements of the measure should be judged to be realistic in a rigorous form of compliance cost assessment by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when he reports. The amendment does not say how often he will have to report. I hope that he will report regularly to Parliament. The amendment says:

"The Secretary of State shall from time to time prepare a report".

We do not know how often "from time to time" is. I hope that it will be on a bi-annual, if not annual basis, so that we can find out how effectively the measure is operating.

Mrs. Maddock: Some of the criticisms that have been made of the Bill are answered by the amendments. It is extremely important that timetables for action are set by the Secretary of State under the Bill and that they are implemented as rapidly as possible. Putting councils' progress in the public domain and exposing them to the glare of publicity is an essential part of ensuring that the Bill results in action. Parliament and the public must know what is going on. Those councils which are blazing the trail should be held up as examples, just as those which are dragging their heels must be encouraged and pressurised into getting their act together and improving progress.

As the Minister knows from our deliberations in Committee, I hoped that the Secretary of State would include in the Bill a requirement to make reports every year. I welcome the remarks of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on that point. I certainly support them. It would be ideal to have an annual statement in the House followed by a short debate on progress in the past 12 months to keep the matter in the public domain. So I am a little disappointed that the only time scale given for the reports is "from time to time".

I hope that when and if the Bill is enacted the Minister will come back with regular reports. Otherwise, he and other relevant Secretaries of State should expect to be pestered on a regular basis not only by me but by other hon. Members and by organisations outside the House on when the next progress report will be forthcoming.

Earlier in the debate, we heard from hon. Members who did not have a particularly good opinion of local authorities. They were concerned that putting a Bill on the statute book would not lead to action. The expectations surrounding the reports show that there is an intention to obtain action. The amendments will ensure that local and central Government work together to ensure absolutely that the Bill is not only words but results in action and that the Bill will lead not only to conservation of energy but to much warmer homes and better health for people.

Mr. Merchant: If I may take up the point that the hon. Member for Christchurch just mentioned, I said earlier that I support the Bill, but that my main reservation is the danger that it will pass into law and be acted on, but only quietly and that, in effect, its provisions will be lost because the public gaze will no longer be on the subject matter. If the Bill is to be effective, it must include proper reporting procedures. So I welcome the amendment, because it strengthens, clarifies and broadens the impact of the Bill.

I have three reasons for thinking that that is true: first, because proper reporting provisions will lead to the establishment of league tables, which have proved to be very effective in many areas of Government activity; secondly, because it is a means of helping to test progress against targets on a national basis; and, thirdly, because it is a good element of open government.

It is well known that there is a good deal of variation in practice between local authorities. If the Bill works effectively, it should draw attention to that variation in an official form. If it is possible to look into a report, hopefully on an annual basis, to look up details of what the different local authorities are doing, and to find out which are slipping behind and which are in the fore, it will focus attention on the weaknesses in some areas and thus, hopefully, enable action to be taken.

I am lucky that being a green authority is one of the main objectives of Bromley—the local authority in my area. Indeed, "clean and green" is its slogan, and it focuses considerable attention on energy conservation as well as other green issues. There is an energy manager, an energy advice line, much work is done in schools and training, and the older members of the population are given special attention, through grants, loans and ensuring that they use energy in the most effective way for their own good.

The amendment will help to achieve a comparison between authorities such as Bromley and those that are dragging their feet. League tables and reports encourage and exhort best practice. They focus attention on the highest standards, which encourage others to follow that example.

I hope that it will be possible for a debate to take place in the House, as part of the report-laying procedure, as that will also help to focus attention on the subject. What the Bill is trying to do—and what the amendment accentuates—is to stress the publicity element of energy conservation. I think that we are all agreed that one of the most important parts of the activity is to encourage the

focusing of more attention on the subject. There are always so many matters in the public domain at once, if conservation is to be maintained as the important issue that it is, it needs a mechanism by which the public's attention can regularly be focused on the progress that is being made. The amendment will help to achieve that.

I do not need to go into detail on national targets. We all know of the importance internationally of our national targets. By ensuring regular reporting and pressure at local level to reach targets, they can also be achieved nationally.

Open government is something in which I strongly believe. Many years ago, I spoke in the debates on the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985. It was one of the first Acts that put a specific responsibility on local government to be open. I do not restrict my feelings on open government to local government. The Bill involves a good deal of responsibility for local government; the onus for carrying out the energy audit and reporting on it is on local government. As information is gathered nationally, the process should be as open as possible. Such openness is a good thing in itself, apart from the other benefits that I have mentioned.

Other hon. Members have referred to targets and compliance costs. There is some uncertainty about exactly what should be included in the reporting procedure because, as yet, we do not have any targets. Rightly, they are not in the Bill. To have included targets would have made the Bill less effective and less worthy. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will set strict targets. I hope that he will aim at around 30 per cent.; in some cases, the targets should be stricter. It is important to have targets in the whole process as they are a good measure by which one can judge progress, as in other areas. I hope, therefore, that targets will form an important feature of the reporting procedures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) was concerned about compliance costs. It is fair to request that details should be included in the reports. However, it is easy to exaggerate the potential cost. I have talked to my local authority and its estimate of the cost of producing the required reports is considerably lower than some of the figures mentioned today. It believes that it could easily adapt its housing conditions survey to include energy auditing, done on a sample of houses. The total amount spent by the local authority each year would be minimal, yet such a survey would achieve all the objectives intended in the Bill. For all those reasons, I very much welcome the amendment. It will strengthen the Bill and make it effective. It will underline the beneficial purpose of the Bill.

Mr. Matthew Banks: I whole-heartedly agree with the majority of points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant). One of the great deficiencies of the Bill is that it does not set proper targets. I listened to the remarks of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), but I believe that the Bill's failure to set targets is its major weakness.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I understand the force of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I point out to him that the Energy Conservation Bill which I promoted last Session contained targets. Conservative Members felt that it should not contain targets, which is why this Bill is in its present form.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Member for Christchurch wanted targets in the Bill, but she has taken them out. I hope that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) will allow me to develop my argument. My genuine concern is that the targets in the Bill are rather wishy-washy. One local authority may take one view and another may take another. One local authority may already have decided to undertake a so-called green audit, yet many others have not gone down that route. Although many Conservative Members support the Bill, it does not quite have the teeth—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman keeps referring to the Bill, but he should be considering the amendments under discussion.

1.30 pm

Mr. Banks: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to deal specifically with the progress reports to which amendments Nos. 8 and 9 refer.

The whole purpose of having reports drawn up by local authorities and reports to the Secretary of State and from the Secretary of State to the House requires a firm foundation on which action can be taken. It is not enough to present a report to the House that shows that action may or may not have been taken by particular local authorities but that no particular target has been reached.

The hon. Member for Christchurch wanted to press for a 30 per cent. target, but for reasons that we all understand, she subsequently referred to a 25 per cent. target. It is now suggested that we should aim at an advisory, guidance figure of about 30 per cent. That is not a firm figure, because, as the Minister has already explained, it will vary from one local authority to another. Some local authorities are already extremely well advanced in promoting energy conservation measures.

The reporting process is cumbersome and bureaucratic. The Bill will set a duty on local authorities to become energy conservation authorities, but it does not specifically set down the relevant national criteria. I recognise that they will vary between one local authority and another, but the hon. Member for Christchurch has backed off from the final hurdle, because the Bill is not what she originally wanted. It does not achieve the objectives desired by the many people who lobbied the House yesterday.

The cornerstone of the reports proposed in the two amendments is that they should ensure that local authorities prepare reports setting out how the energy efficiency of residential properties in their areas can be improved. The central issue dealt with in Committee was whether there should be a requirement on local authorities to aim for the specific numerical improvement of the 30 per cent. target or, as the Government proposed, aim to achieve only a significant improvement. The hon. Member for Christchurch put a forceful case, but she has not got precisely what she wanted in terms of the amendments or, if you will allow me to say so, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill.

The hon. Lady pointed out that, five years ago, the Government told the intergovernmental panel on climate change that good housekeeping could improve energy

[Mr. Banks]

efficiency by some 10 per cent. I accept that that is the case. Without the reports mentioned in the amendments, we shall be unable to check on progress towards that target.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to what took place in Committee and I recognise that some of the objections to the Bill have been gradually whittled away, which is a welcome move. We must bear in mind the fact that local authority associations have fought against the specific targets that the hon. Member for Christchurch wanted. Those councils were particularly concerned about whether they would be able to meet targets that were perhaps too high and the fact that specific targets did not recognise what one local authority was doing as opposed to another. Those associations have been active in campaigning to improve energy efficiency, and they have carried out a great deal of work to achieve that among their members.

I referred earlier to the difference in housing stock. I recognise that some local authorities to which I have referred will have had a much easier task because of their particular circumstances. When referring to the reporting process and the authorities that the amendments will create, I am mindful of the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who said that his local authority was extremely small and did not have many officers. Therefore, he argued, the tasks which the amendments would effectively place on his local authority would be burdensome to it. I believe that the target date for those proposals to become effective—perhaps the hon. Lady might confirm that—is April 1996. It might perhaps have been better to have chosen a later date for implementation, but nevertheless 1996 it is.

Although many of the objections that were made by Conservative Members when we debated the previous two Bills on this subject have been tackled, we are left with something that is not as tangible as one would have liked. As the amended clause stands, it will require each local authority to prepare those reports and especially to consider practicable, cost-effective measures likely to result in significant improvement in domestic energy savings.

That is rather willy-nilly. No extra money is made available as a result of the Bill, and I am far from certain whether the proposals contained in amendment No. 9 will have an impact. We shall merely set up a great many committees—a talking shop—and I am not convinced that there will be any tangible results.

The reports to which the amendment refers will have to include an assessment of the costs of such measures, an assessment of their impact on carbon dioxide emissions and a statement of the council's policy for taking into account the personal circumstances of persons to whom grants or loans may be offered. Assessments of the impact on emissions of sulphur and nitrogen oxides, job creation and fuel bills may also be included in the reports—which local authorities may discuss—but only at the discretion of the local authority. There is nothing specific—only generalities as to what must be placed in the reports. It will be for the authorities to decide for themselves whom to consult when preparing their reports. One local authority may consult one group of people, but there is no standardisation throughout the country.

Amendment No. 8 sets out the steps to be taken by the Secretary of State under subsection 3(2)(b). It will oblige the Secretary of State to set a deadline for submission of those reports to him, but what will happen when that deadline arrives and those reports are submitted? The Secretary of State will also have to set a deadline for submission of progress reports. Presumably the Government will direct local authorities to modify or update their reports.

The hon. Member for Christchurch appeared to be urging that we hold an annual debate on those reports. It conjured up in my mind a possibility of a debate similar to the debates on the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. We would know that, once during a 12-month period, we would have an opportunity to consider energy conservation and what local authorities are doing. In view of the opportunities that right hon. and hon. Members now have to discuss those issues, especially in debates on the Adjournment of the House, I believe that that suggestion would be welcome, and would provide a peg on which to hang that subject.

I also welcome, but I do not want to stray too far into a debate on, amendment No. 10—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will not stray on to it at all.

Mr. Banks: I am most grateful for your continued guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. The fact that amendments Nos. 8 and 9 will allow for reports similar to those that will, one hopes, be made if progress is made with the Northern Irish Assembly, is most welcome.

I return to the first, and key, fact that I mentioned—that local authority associations have been unhappy with the idea of setting specific targets. The Bill has been considerably watered down. I accept that Conservative Members have had genuine objections. There has been concern about creating unwieldy bureaucracy, and about the necessity of having reports and queries on what will be done when reports are produced.

I am not convinced that enough local authority time is spent dealing with the nitty-gritty concerns of my constituents and those of right hon. and hon. Members in other boroughs. If we create extra responsibilities for local authorities, we place greater costs on them—but for what? Earlier today, hon. Members on both sides of the House referred to the grants available for pipe lagging and window insulation—laudable provisions. But the amendments do not produce one extra penny towards the issues about which the hon. Member for Christchurch and my hon. Friends are concerned.

I am not convinced that the amendments will necessarily prove the success that we would want. The hon. Lady and those of us who have supported the Bill will be able to return to our constituencies and say that we have raised the important subject of energy conservation. In relation to the reports, I am concerned—particularly in the light of the introduction of VAT on gas and electricity—that we need to ensure that every opportunity is taken to reduce emissions and that,

wherever possible, we introduce grants for energy conservation. I am not convinced that the Bill will take us a major step—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying into the realms of Third Reading. If he wants to speak on Third Reading, he had better stick to the amendments now.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not propose to catch your eye on Third Reading.

Although I took a particular interest in the amendment relating to mobile homes, amendments Nos. 8 and 9 are probably the most important. Although the amendments do not set targets and merely provide guidance, unless there is a mechanism for local authorities to discuss, in their own boroughs, energy efficiency, how they encourage energy conservation—particularly in their housing stock—and energy efficiency in mobile homes, I do not believe that progress will be made.

It is all very well for progress to be made and reporting to take place within local authorities. The amendments are important—particularly where they relate to clause 3(2)(b)—because without a mechanism that requires the Secretary of State to report to the House, hon. Members will not have the opportunity to discuss in the House important matters affecting our constituents, particularly those who are less well off.

Mr. Fabricant: I very much welcome amendments Nos. 8 and 9, which follow on logically, not just numerically, from amendments Nos. 5, 6 and 7, which were adopted by the House and which involved the judgmental basis of the reports.

I have a love of glasnost and open government. My love of open government may be because I am not in government; my love of glastnost is probably because my work frequently used to take me to the Soviet Union in the days of glasnost under Mikhail Gorbachev, when Radio Moscow was one of my clients. I did not meet the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) in Moscow on any of her frequent visits to that city as chairman of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. However, I am sure that she, too, shares a love of glasnost for similar reasons.

I think that there should be regular reports. Regularity of reports is not specified in the Bill, and that is a significant omission. It is not unreasonable to expect annual reports to be provided to Parliament. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport that there should be regular debates on the issue in Parliament. If we were to debate regularly the Army, the Navy and every other issue that hon. Members would like to debate, we would have no time to pass legislation. However, it is not unreasonable to request that a written annual report be laid before the Parliament.

1.45 pm

What should such an annual report contain? Most of its contents were described extremely well by my hon. Friend in his magnum opus. However, I think that some form of league tables should apply to the various energy conservation authorities. Like the noble Baroness Thatcher—I do not compare myself to her, but while she had a law degree and a degree in chemistry, I have a law degree and am a master of science—I am interested in things which are both quantitative and qualitative.

I do not underestimate the difficulty of quantifying those criteria that are purely qualitative. League tables encounter that difficulty: sometimes they oversimplify the relative positions of that which is being compared. Nevertheless, league tables have the major advantage of demonstrating how one authority's performance compares with that of another.

Perhaps in his reply to this part of the debate, the Minister will confirm whether league tables would form part of the reports. What form would they take and how often would the reports be published? Could there not be a written annual report, or does the Minister feel that the data may not be collected easily?

We need a national annual report not only to see what the local energy conservation authorities are doing but to make comparisons with national or international benchmarks. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport raised that matter.

Mr. Matthew Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. There is constant reference to Stockport in relation to my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) and I are constantly confused with one another, but my constituency should not be confused with another.

Mr. Fabricant: I stand admonished; I was of course referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks).

There should be benchmarks in this sector, which could perhaps relate to the criteria set by the Rio earth summit. It is worth reminding the House that it was the noble Baroness Thatcher who instigated that 1992 summit. Would not the criteria agreed at that summit serve as useful benchmarks against which the performances of energy conservation authorities could be measured?

Annual reports could serve that national role. However, I pointed out earlier that energy conservation is a double-sided equation. On the one side, we see the loss of energy through lack of insulation; and on the other, we have the efficient use of energy through the application of energy-efficient machinery. There are huge discrepancies between the efficiency of, for example, washing machines and driers. Some use twice as much energy as others to achieve the same effect.

I wonder whether the annual report could contain a league table listing which pieces of equipment were more efficient than others—a sort of *Which?* report on energy conservation. If the Department is not prepared to compile a table, perhaps we should encourage the Consumers Association to do it, if it does not do so already.

In any event, an annual report would be welcome. It should contain league tables so that we can compare the performance of energy conservation authorities locally. The local authorities should be measured against national or international benchmarks, which could well be the Rio summit criteria. There should also be regular mention of the different types of home appliances because there is no question but that some are far more efficient than others. All those matters form part of the general energy conservation in which we as a nation can engage.

Mr. Hendry: I, too, think that this important amendment should be welcomed, but I shall explain why what we are discussing is not a poor substitute for targets.

[Mr. Hendry]

I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) because I believe that a report would be a significant improvement on the concept of targets.

Targets would be difficult to enforce because it has become clear that some parts of the country are more advanced in terms of energy conservation than others. If all areas were given the same blanket target, there would inevitably be some discrepancies and those areas that had already gone further than others would find themselves unable to meet the targets by dint of the fact that they had already done more.

We have already discussed the fact that some parts of the country contain many more older properties than others. It would be unreasonable for Rochdale, which has many small old houses, to be given exactly the same target as Milton Keynes or Telford, where the bulk of the housing stock is more modern and where there are already in place much more sophisticated methods of energy conservation. We should therefore naturally shy away from targets. If there were national targets, the local authorities that would find it most difficult to meet the targets would be those that had already done the most.

It would be much more effective to have in place a system of national reporting. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), I should prefer a system of league tables. More effectively than anything else, such a system would enable us to ask local authorities why some were doing better than others and to give a kick start to those that we felt were not doing enough.

A good example for us to follow would be the league table system for examination results. That system has resulted in individual schools saying each year that they want to do better. It is much more effective than a system of targets which would mean saying that every school should achieve a certain number of GCSE or A-level passes. Now, each year, schools can compare themselves with others which motivates all of them to do better—not just better than schools around and about but better than they each managed to achieve the previous year. A system of league tables would be a much greater spur to progress on the conservation front than a set of targets which, at the end of the day, would be pretty well unenforceable.

It is quite right that authorities should report to us and that we should have the chance to debate in the House the progress that they have made, because we want to know where they stand. More than that, we want to be able to get a picture of the situation across the country, so that we could then ask questions of them as to why some of them have done better than others and why some are not doing as well as we might have expected. That would mean that we, the Government and others, could badger local authorities to do more, to push forward, to ensure that they are in no doubt that we believe that the authorities that are at the bottom of the league tables need to be chased.

On education again, we have found that the league tables show that Derbyshire is at the bottom. That gives us the power as local Members of Parliament to examine why Derbyshire delegates less to its schools than any other county. If it was not for the league tables, we would not be able to put pressure on Derbyshire to do better.

There has also been some debate about the regularity with which the reports should be issued. I have to disagree with those who have said that it should be annually, or even bi-annually. It is entirely right that it should be from time to time. I say that for two reasons. First, if there is a requirement on local authorities to prepare reports too regularly, it will become a distraction and their energies and resources will be channelled into preparing them, when it should be going into the meat of the energy conservation programme. If we required them to prepare an annual report, not only would extra costs be incurred in the process, but their efforts and initiatives would be diverted from what we want them to be doing.

Secondly, a more important point is that, year in and year out, we will find that progress is made on that front, and therefore further progress each year becomes more difficult. If one starts from a low base, it is easy to make a big step in energy conservation, but 20 or 30—even 50 or 60—years down the line, when the Act still lies on the statute book, the same degree of progress will become more difficult. Whatever one might be able to achieve in one or two years, a similar proportionate improvement in energy conservation will not be achievable in future years, because so much progress will have been made.

We must bear in mind that, in the Bill and through the amendment, we are establishing a reporting progress that will be set in stone for all time. At some point in the future, when all houses have perfect energy conservation, or have gone as far as they can, it will be quite proper that the Secretary of State should turn around and say, "I do not think that we need another report on this for 10 or 20 years, because we have gone this far." It would be idiocy if we were still bound by a system of annual or bi-annual reports which the Secretary of State had to lay before Parliament, and statements had to be made to show what further progress had been made in the year.

That situation will evolve. It will steadily improve. It is right, therefore, that the Secretary of State should have the flexibility to say that we want reports bi-annually at the moment, or perhaps every three or five years, but in years to come we wish to have them on a more irregular basis and with a greater intervening period. That is pragmatic and sensible. That is why I believe the Government's approach to be right.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the discipline required of local authorities presenting an annual report to the Secretary of State—I remind my hon. Friend that the clauses say that the Secretary of State, not the local authorities, shall prepare the annual report—is a discipline that should be in place? In fact, that would not be a distraction, because it would be within an authority's normal procedures to produce the hard data from which the Secretary of State was able to prepare his report.

Mr. Hendry: I understand clearly my hon. Friend's point, but I disagree with him, for this reason: the discipline is important if it is meaningful. Given that we are considering a general survey of properties, it is essentially a random selection. If the reports are gathered over too regular a period, the changes that will occur will be smaller than the margin of error that one might expect from a random survey. As a result, although it is important to have discipline, a report may say, "Here is the improvement that has taken place, but I am afraid that, because of the margin of error involved in the process, it is actually of no consequence whatsoever."

The House wants to debate issues of substance. We therefore want substantial reports. There must be a reporting process that enables us to see changes that have taken place. To achieve that, reports must be meaningful. For those reasons, I believe that the amendment is right and that the Government's phraseology is correct. I am happy to support the amendment.

2 pm

Ms Ruddock: I support the amendments. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) tabled an amendment in Committee which required annual reports. At the time, the Minister persuaded her to withdraw her amendment so that he could return on Report with his own wording. We are pleased that he has kept his undertaking, because it is crucial, if we are to make real progress, that we know precisely what is happening and the potential, and that we can measure progress year on year.

We need to know the cost of the energy conservation measures that each local authority can put in place. We need to know the extent of carbon dioxide emissions that might result from those proposals. We would be extremely interested in the number of jobs that might be created if those measures were taken.

Furthermore, the assessment of average savings that could accrue from the measures to individual households is not just important to them; it is extremely important also in the national context with regard to conserving energy and slowing the rate at which we use up finite resources. For all those reasons, drawing together all local authority reports into one national report would do a great service to this country and to the Government, and to the potential for better administration.

We do not share the scepticism and cynicism of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) when he referred to the possibility of costs rising from around £20 million to £100 million. If it takes more than £20 million to deal with the problem, I would much prefer that money to be spent on energy efficiency measures at local level than for it to go into share options for members of the boards of privatised utilities.

The reports are necessary. We must understand what the Bill will provide for in terms of reporting at local level. Drawing all that information together will make it possible to compare authorities. That is healthy. League tables of that kind are perfectly appropriate and we would very much support them. We have no fear about how well Labour-controlled authorities would perform, because we know that they would be near the top of the league.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ruddock: No, there is not enough time. I do not want to delay this part of our proceedings.

Let me make it clear that a Labour Government would very much welcome, and would establish, annual reporting. We would require an annual environment report of all Ministers concerned with energy efficiency and other environmental processes. Not only do we believe that such a report should be debated in Parliament, but we would also submit it for scrutiny to the environmental audit committee which we intend to establish with powers similar to that of the Public Accounts Committee. With those few words, I very much welcome the amendment.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: With the leave of the House, may I say that the amendment, and the substance of the matter, is about transparency, targets and performance against those targets. I will return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) later because I do not agree with him at all about the targets and I shall explain why.

We have considered the time frame. Some hon. Members, like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), suggested that the reports should be bi-annual; others believe that they should be annual. It is not that we are trying to avoid having annual—

Mr. Merchant: If I gave my hon. Friend the impression that I wanted bi-annual reports, it was a false impression. My suggestion was that they should be annual.

Mr. Jones: I apologise to my hon. Friend. When I look at my notes, which are slightly untidy, I see that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) who wanted the reports to be bi-annual.

The point is that we want to tie the reports in with the housing investment programme submissions and allocations which at present constitute an annual system. But when one considers the burden of drawing up such reports on some small rural authorities, it is not sensible to preclude us from reforming the HIP system and putting it on a bi-annual basis for authorities with less than a certain amount of stock, or whatever the criterion might be.

Although I envisage the reports as annual for the time being, if the HIP process were reformed I should not want to be boxed in by something in the Bill requiring authorities that did not have to submit their HIP reports every year to continue to submit the other reports. Hon. Members will understand that.

My second point is about cost. Reference was made to the need for a system of inspectors to follow up the assessments and to see what has changed in the meantime. That would not be necessary. First, the technique of conducting stock profiles is developing all the time, making it easier and easier to do without the thermal thought police.

Secondly, the private sector can be involved. The Nationwide building society already includes an energy rating in all its surveys, and the Halifax building society is doing the same on a pilot basis. I hope that, before long, all building societies and other lenders will follow suit, which will mean that from house sales we shall have a steady year-on-year picture of how stock in the private sector is progressing. That involves no inspectors, simply the normal market processes.

Within the normal regime that applies to local authorities, I expect that, as we already require them to have an energy efficiency strategy as part of their HIP submissions, we shall be able to build on that, thus minimising additional costs for them. I hope that that will reassure my hon. Friends.

I must tackle head on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport, who seemed to be arguing both ways. He wanted the rigidity of targets built into the Bill to ensure delivery, but at the same time he did not want unfair impositions on local authorities. He cannot have it both ways.

[Mr. Jones]

Three problems would arise if we built a target into a Bill. First, if there is to be a target of 30 per cent. one has to decide what it is 30 per cent. of. Many local authorities have no stock profile at all, so how can they measure 30 per cent. from a base line that they do not have?

Secondly, we should have to lay down in primary legislation the methodology for the calculation, which would more than double the length of the Bill. Furthermore, my hon. Friend knows how litigious people are nowadays, and it is absurd that one might be taken to court because of a difference between 29.9 per cent. and 30.1 per cent. on the basis of calculations that had been set down in primary legislation. It is much better to lay down targets in guidance for local authorities and to use the HIP system to police them.

Moreover, we shall wish to adjust the targets as the years go by, depending on our international commitments. I referred earlier to the commitment given by the Secretary of State in the context of the Berlin conference. I do not see the targets as written in tablets of stone. We shall wish to re-examine the position from time to time.

Of course, we shall also wish to examine the impact on individual local authorities. The burden of evidence submitted by the local authority associations—this was well discussed in Committee—was that they preferred the more flexible approach in the guidance notes to the more rigid approach involved by having the measure in the Bill.

The third reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Southport is fundamentally wrong is that there are other ways of approaching this subject which may become more relevant over a period. Instead of looking at savings from a base line, we may well wish to look at how to get to a particular point on the minimum ratings of the energy efficiency of homes, as we do with new builds, through the building regulations system and the regime for housing association properties.

If one authority is far less energy efficient than another, it might be appropriate for that authority to have a bigger target because it will need to do more work to get to that minimum level of energy efficiency. An authority that has a highly energy-efficient stock—if there were such an authority—would have less of a gap to close.

For those three excellent reasons, it will be much better to deal with the matter in the course of the guidance so that we can adapt to changing circumstances and technology and to the real requirements of the world, instead of trying to box ourselves into a measure which was denounced in one phrase by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport and supported in another. All along, the Government have been desirous of achieving something better than the Energy Conservation Bill promoted by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), and I think that we are gradually getting there.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend the Minister has stated that 30 per cent. of a very low base still leaves a low energy efficient stock. For those authorities that have a very low energy-efficient rating, will my hon. Friend consider setting guidance of absolute SAP levels for that authority or for a range of authorities?

Mr. Jones: That is precisely the point I am trying to make. At first, we want to set a target of 30 per cent. for every local authority, but those who feel they have a case for exemption from that target—one or two have been mentioned—can talk to us. If they are as good as they think, we will have no difficulty in accepting their reasoning.

The SAP regime is in its early stages and it would not be right to move to that immediately, but it does commend itself to many hon. Members, particularly those who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, have served on the Select Committee and seen the advantages of the energy rating of homes. For all of those reasons, I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 9, in page 3, line 20, leave out 'and (3)' and insert 'to (4)'.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

Clause 8

NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendment made: No. 10, in page 3, line 38, after 'Ireland;' insert—

'( ) the reference in section 3(4) to laying before Parliament shall be construed as a reference to laying before the Northern Ireland Assembly;'.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Mrs. Maddock: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

When first I came to the House 20 months ago, I could not have dreamt that I would be in the position that I am today of having the opportunity to guide a Bill through the House. I could also not have dreamt that I would spend a large part of a Friday morning discussing narrow boats and canal boats. Nor did I expect to described as a moderate. That has not been my role in politics, and for a number of years I have been a thorn in the side of politicians.

The Bill is only the beginning, and we all want to see its implementation in the coming years. On Committee, the Minister gave a number of assurances about the contents of the guidance notes which would be issued to local authorities when they were implementing the Bill, and about the firmness with which the measures would be enforced.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) was critical about the potential outcome of the Bill and about the fact that we did not have targets on the face of the Bill. My hon. Friends and I—and many people outside the House who support the Bill—would have welcomed his support in that area much earlier as we pressed the Government on some of those points.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does the hon. Lady accept that she herself took the targets out of the Bill?

Mrs. Maddock: The hon. Gentleman should have waited for my next sentence. The resulting Bill accommodates the views of local authorities, local authority associations, the Government, myself and all those who have supported the Bill and ensured that we would put an energy conservation Bill on to the statute book.

It is vital to the success of the Bill that we have the assurances that the Minister has given and that those assurances are kept. Passing the Bill will lay the foundations of a national energy conservation strategy, but it is up to local government to build on those

foundations and up to central Government to see that the building is solid and proceeds at a reasonable pace. The Minister is the foreman of the building programme. He is a foreman in whom I have great confidence. Apart from what I like to believe was a temporary aberration in November, the Minister's support for an energy conservation Bill has been firm. I thank him for that.

I particularly thank the Minister for his constructive approach in the Committee proceedings. The Committee was a fine example of how hon. Members from across the House can work together to achieve a common aim. I also thank other hon. Members who served on the Committee and were co-operative.

There was considerable reorganisation of the clauses of the Bill in Committee. Many changes were made, some beneficial and some not so beneficial. However, the quality of the Bill and the effect that it will have is just as significant as when my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) introduced a similar Bill this time last year. I am sure that hon. Members do not need reminding of the fate of the Bill on that occasion. The central thrust of my Bill remains the same as two years ago when my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) introduced a ten-minute Bill.

The thrust of the Bill is to give local authorities a duty to assess the potential for energy savings in their area and to produce a plan or report saying how they would achieve those savings, and for the relevant Secretary of State to set every council a timetable for action, which would be closely monitored. That would lead to a reduction in emissions of polluting gases but also to warmer homes and potentially lower fuel bills. It would also cut the incidence of cold-related deaths from, for example, hypothermia. That would save not only lives but NHS financial resources.

Yesterday more than 500 people came to London to support the Bill. The director of Friends of the Earth told us all that he believed that the Bill was a win-win-win measure. I support that contention. Before I conclude, I must quickly pay tribute to all those who have contributed to the Bill's progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North and my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed have guided the Bill through its evolution. I also pay tribute to the huge number of councils of all political persuasions which have passed motions in support of the Bill. The number was more than 700 at the last count. The last one came in from a parish council near Chelmsford yesterday.

A tremendous range of national organisations has supported the Bill. In particular, the Association for the Conservation of Energy was an indispensable source of advice and assistance and, indeed, persistence, as the rest of us were.

The Bill is the beginning of the energy conservation story. It certainly should not be the end. If the Bill is passed, it will be a sign of the commitment across the House to energy conservation and of the commitment of people across Britain, more than 500 of whom took the trouble to come to London yesterday to support it. The Bill and its predecessor have been discussed five times on the Floor of the House in 14 months. I hope that hon. Members will feel that the concerns that they have expressed have been taken into account during that time and that they will share my view that the Bill has not been damaged in the process. I hope that they will all support the Third Reading.

2.19 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am glad that the first words on my brief are that I support the motion that the Bill be read the Third time. I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on having successfully piloted it thus far. She has done so with skill and a great deal of common sense.

I also join in the general welcome from the House and outside for the fact that the hon. Lady the opportunity provided by her good fortune in the ballot to take up the important topic of energy efficiency in the home. In her Third Reading speech, she said that I had a long history of involvement with the topic. I am glad that I have had the good fortune to be the Minister at the time that the Bill reached this point.

There has been no point at which I would have changed my mind, even last November, whatever the hon. Member for Christchurch might say. I told the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that I thought that we could do better than his Bill, and that has been proved by our debates.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Department of the Environment, despite our awful building, and perhaps it is appropriate in that anniversary year that we are considering this Bill, as it touches on areas for which my Department has had responsibility since its inception—housing and local government—and on one of its newest responsibilities—energy efficiency. It will be interesting to see how posterity will view the Bill as a contribution to energy efficiency in another 25 years. It has the potential to make a valuable contribution.

The Bill will now pass to another place for further consideration in a less rigid, more clearly defined and more workable form. I wish it well in its progress there and look forward to seeing it on the statute book.

2.21 pm

Mr. Beith: It is a privilege to be able to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on the excellent work that she has done to pilot the Bill through the House and to speak in what I hope are the closing moments of a debate that I feel I started on moving the Second Reading of a similar Bill a year ago. During these debates, we have developed the curious caricature that my hon. Friend is the moderate and I am the extreme radical, and that the environmental proposals were so radical that they had to be substantially modified.

We have been engaged in the exercise of trying to meet reservations in various quarters—whether of local authority associations or of Ministers—to arrive at something that the Government would agree to see through the House, and it is true that the Minister played a considerable part in securing this achievement. He gave away the secret—it lay in accepting that the new burdens procedure could be brought into play as regards the Bill. Neither he nor I think that that will be particularly costly for local authorities and we both think that the gains will hugely outweigh the costs. The Minister set himself the task of getting the Treasury to accept that and applied

[Mr. Beith]

himself to it with zeal, pressed on, I am sure, by the huge public campaign that has been waged and the absurdity of continuing to resist legislation in this area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has done an excellent job and, as she said, we have built important foundations for energy conservation policy, on which we now need to build.

2.22 pm

Ms Ruddock: I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on the way in which she has brought the Bill to what should, I hope, be its final stages in the House. I also pay tribute to her main advisers—the Association for the Conservation of Energy—which has been very helpful to all the members of the Committee and gave us the opportunity to benefit from its great expertise in the subject.

Reaching this stage of the Bill has been a complex process, as we heard from several hon. Members, and we all feared that we might not reach this final hurdle successfully. I thank the Minister for his co-operation and for fulfilling his promises in Committee, which became successful amendments and were agreed today.

The Bill is timely. One of the greatest obstacles to developing a strategy for energy efficiency and, more importantly, for energy conservation has been the lack of information. In recent times, it has become more difficult to gather that information and, by making local authorities into energy conservation authorities, in the Bill we will have the opportunity systematically to gather information about the conditions in people's homes. We have the opportunity to assess what can be done to improve them.

In all those ways, this small, simple Bill—a modest measure which will not cost the country a great deal—can set us on a course whereby we can develop a much more comprehensive energy strategy. That will not only make people feel warmer in their homes, but may conceivably reduce fuel bills and enable us as a nation to contribute to meeting the international obligations set at Rio. For all those reasons, I very much welcome, on behalf of the Opposition, the Third Reading of the Bill. I wish it a successful passage in the other place.

2.24 pm

Mr. Leigh: I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on the way in which she introduced the Bill. She has learnt the essential lesson of all private Members' Bills. If one wants to get them through and past the Government, one has to have a light touch—a touch so light that the public may not notice the result. I shall not be mean about the Bill or submit to the temptation of talking for another six minutes which would not be popular with hon. Members on either side.

I am pleased that I have, almost uniquely—apart from one or two other hon. Members—been given an opportunity today to talk about economic realities. I refer the House to clause 2(2), which says:

"The report shall set out energy conservation measures that the authority considers practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation".

I hope that authorities, especially small authorities, will realise that they should act moderately. I hope that they will appreciate that it is only by improving attitudes among the public and by ensuring that they understand the true cost of energy that we shall achieve what we all want—a reduction in the amount of energy we use in our homes and businesses.

2.26 pm

Mr. Merchant: I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words on Third Reading. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) in congratulating the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on the skill with which she has piloted through the Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his good wisdom in assisting that process. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) on the good humour she showed on her countenance throughout the debate as she sat on the Opposition Benches almost in splendid isolation—until a few moments ago, when she was mysteriously joined by some of her colleagues.

When I picked up the Bill last night to have another look at it, I made the mistake of picking up the original version. I thought that it was surprising and remarkable that nothing much had been changed in Committee. I then realised that I was looking at the wrong version. When I read the Bill as amended in Committee, I found the changes so considerable that I could scarcely recognise it. Having had the benefit of sitting through the Report stage this morning, I realise that the changes have significantly improved the Bill. We now have a Bill which has a good purpose and which will achieve in practice what it is intended to achieve. I fear that the earlier version may not have done that.

The Bill not only sets up energy conservation authorities, but stipulates clearly what they shall do. For the first time, it puts on them a clear duty to carry out certain functions to do with assessing the state of energy conservation in their areas and then reporting to the House. The Bill does so with, as I said earlier, a light touch. It does so effectively without going into considerable detail. Thermal policing techniques would have been involved if the Bill had been more complex and if it had set out more specific duties.

Clearly, the Bill does not require officers of the local authority to hammer on doors or to go inside every house. It does not require them to go through the onerous activities that would have been involved if every house had had to be measured for energy effectiveness. Instead, local authorities can show some flexibility. They can achieve the objectives of the Bill by applying their own techniques and by using sampling processes. By that, they will achieve as accurate a picture as would have been achieved if detailed requirements had been involved. For that reason, I support the Third Reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) (Northern Ireland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Bill be now read a Second time.—[*Rev. Ian Paisley.*]

2.29 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I should like to say a few words on the Bill because obviously Northern Ireland is an important part of the United Kingdom. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame on you."] The House should have rather more time to discuss this matter. [HON. MEMBERS: "This is disgraceful."] I do not think that it is right that a Bill of this nature which, after all, will have a significant affect—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 21 April.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS)(WALES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

PRISONERS (RETURN TO CUSTODY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

NATURAL DISASTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LAND REGISTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS)(SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

NATIONAL HEALTH PATIENT ACCOMMODATION BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

CARERS (RECOGNITION AND SERVICES) BILL

Ordered,

That Standing Committee C be discharged from considering the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill and that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Dixon.*]

Committee on Friday 21 April.

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 5097/95, relating to Common Agricultural Policy price proposals, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee A.—[*Mr. Wood.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 21st March, the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Agricultural Prices not later than Ten o'clock; and the Order [19th December] (Statutory Instruments and European Community Documents) shall not apply.—[*Mr. Wood.*]

Asylum Seekers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Wood.*]

2.32 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): A young Somali girl came to see me at my most recent advice surgery in my constituency. She is just 19 years old and is a refugee. She has been in this country since 1993, having previously been in a refugee camp in Kenya. She is now caring for four brothers aged between three and 15, two sisters aged seven and eight and an elderly grandmother. In the past two years, no decision has been taken on her application for asylum. Her parents are still in a refugee camp in Kenya. It is quite possible that a number of years could pass before a decision is taken on that girl's application and, even then, there is no guarantee that her parents will ever be able to join her and her brothers and sisters in this country. Anyone who is involved with refugees and asylum seekers could repeat many similar stories.

The main issue that I wish to raise is family reunion for asylum seekers, for those who have been granted asylum and those granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom. The Minister will have seen early-day motion 400, which refers to this matter, and the charter produced last year by the British Refugee Council, which was sent to him just before Christmas.

First, I shall say a few general things about the asylum process, to provide relevant background to what is happening about family reunion. It is obvious that there has been a significant change in the past few years, especially since the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force on 1 August 1993. The Government then argued that we needed speedier decisions, and I do not think that many of us had any quarrel with that, although we did question, and still would question, whether decisions should be taken in accordance with the time scales in the 1993 Act for fast-tracking of applications.

The Government also argued during the passage of the 1993 legislation that exceptional leave to remain was being abused, in the sense that it was being used for non-deserving cases and that exceptional leave was often granted simply because a person had been in the country for several years waiting for a decision to be made about an application. The Government argued that exceptional leave to remain was often granted, not because a case was especially strong, but because it was felt that it could be granted on compassionate or humanitarian grounds although asylum was not justified.

Since then—and to some extent before that time, but the process has accelerated since the 1993 Act came into force—refusal rates have increased sharply and are now running at slightly more than 80 per cent., exceptional leave to remain has decreased and refugee status is now granted to very few people, between 3 and 4 per cent. of those who apply.

Many of the figures that are produced in answers to parliamentary questions distort what is happening, because two separate queues are being operated in the asylum division of the Home Office. One is a queue of asylum seekers who applied before the 1993 Act came into force. A separate group of staff deals with a separate queue of people who have applied since the 1993 Act came into force.

The queues are moving at very different rates. Nearly 42,000 applications were made between 1 August 1993, when the 1993 Act came into force, and 31 December 1994, of which more than 20,000 have been determined and a further approximately 2,000 withdrawn. In other words, more than half the people who have applied since 1 August 1993 have received a decision of some sort. That leaves nearly 20,000 who have not.

Of the slightly more than 40,000 cases that were outstanding at the time that the 1993 Act came into force, 35,700 remained outstanding on 31 December 1994. If that rate of progress is maintained, some of those people, having already waited several years for a decision, could expect to wait perhaps six, seven or eight years more. I suspect that probably very few of those people in the "old cases" queue will be granted refugee status, but that a considerably higher proportion will obtain exceptional leave; probably a rather higher proportion of those people than of those who have applied since the 1993 Act came into force will obtain exceptional leave.

One question that the Minister may be able to answer—if he does not have the information with him, perhaps he will let us know later—is how the 150 new staff in the asylum division will be distributed and whether they will concentrate on the new cases or on the ones that were outstanding before the 1993 Act came into force.

A further consequence of the regime now being operated and of the very high rate of refusals is that the appeals system is being clogged up with ever longer waiting times for appeals. Several thousand people are already waiting and several hundred more are being added to the queue every month. That has an impact, not only on asylum seekers, but on all immigration appeals. Many of those are appeals which concern family reunion because they are cases of people who have been refused entry for husbands, wives or fiancés and are appealing against that decision.

Many people who work with refugees and have dealt with case work often find it extremely difficult to distinguish between those who are given asylum and those who are given exceptional leave to remain. I recall two people who, by chance, came to the same advice surgery that I held, one of whom was given asylum and the other exceptional leave.

The man who was given exceptional leave was a Tamil who had been arrested in Sri Lanka and had spent three years in prison. There was clear evidence of beating with lumps of wood with holes filled with concrete and of other torture. It was documented by the Medical Foundation for the Care of the Tortured.

The man, who was well educated, knew precisely what had happened to him and could explain in clear terms what had happened. He was given exceptional leave to remain. Many of us would be able to give similar examples where it is extremely difficult to see why a person was given only exceptional leave and not asylum.

There are serious consequences for family reunions. A person who is granted asylum is allowed reunion, but that is not the whole story. The reunion may be allowed, but that does not necessarily mean that there will not be delays. There may have been delays in deciding the claim for asylum and delays in decisions on family admissions. A restrictive definition of "family" is used, comprising husband, wife and children under 18. That fails to take into account other relatives such as aged parents or extended family units where people have lived together as a family in whatever country they have left.

If a person is given exceptional leave to remain, the rule is that there is a four-year wait before an application for family reunion will normally be considered. There is then a wait for the decision, which may take months. That is all time on top of the time waited for the original decision on exceptional leave.

Let us consider the cumulative effect of those waits, particularly on people who applied well before the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force. There are cases of people having to wait five, six, seven or eight years for a decision on their case. They then have to wait a further four years before they can apply for family reunion, and perhaps more time on top of that before they are given a decision.

The effects of such a process and what it says about respect for family life are obvious. It is not too difficult to see that people are much more likely to be happy, settled and economically productive if they feel comfortable and know that their family is secure and able to join them, than if they are worried about other family members left behind in dreadful conditions, in camps or under threat. One asylum seeker described that process as a second torture to be endured.

The United Nations high commissioner for refugees has declared her support for family reunion. She said:

"while the family remains the basic unit of society, it is also the greatest casualty in any social upheaval. For millions of refugees who have been forced to abandon their homes, their belongings and their country, the family is all that is left."

She went on to appeal for all states to be more generous in allowing admissions based on family reunion.

I have some basic questions for the Minister. Why is there not a right to family reunion when people are granted exceptional leave to remain? Why are there bureaucratic delays? Why is it not possible to make decisions on family reunion within a reasonable time scale—say, six months? Why is the existence of wider family units not recognised? Why is poverty and the inability to give clear proof that one does not need recourse to public funds a barrier to the simple reunion of a family? Why is there not more sympathetic use of Home Office discretion?

It is commonly argued that exceptional leave to remain is a privilege; it does not mean that someone is settled in this country, and therefore no decision about family reunions should be reached until that point is reached. However, those who have been granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom entered the country in the hope of staying here. If the political situations in their countries of origin change, they may wish to return, but it seems highly unlikely that they would not take their families with them.

Very few people who are granted exceptional leave to remain in the UK have that leave withdrawn. In answer to my parliamentary question, the Minister estimated that leave was withdrawn about 15 times per year, and in most cases it was withdrawn at the end of the first year. There is little evidence to suggest that the people who are granted exceptional leave do not wish to settle in this country.

I gave one example at the beginning of my speech, and I will conclude by examining several other cases which illustrate the current situation. An Iraqi man arrived in the United Kingdom in 1989 and sought asylum. Three years later, he was granted exceptional leave to remain in this country. He appealed against that decision and three years later, in 1995—six years after his arrival—his appeal was heard and he was granted asylum. He was therefore entitled

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

to family reunion, but during that six-year delay two of his children had turned 18 and were no longer regarded as family under the law. That man is devastated at the thought that he will not see his children again.

A Somali woman arrived in the United Kingdom in 1990. In 1993 she was granted entry visas for her six children, who were in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. Four of her children came to the United Kingdom, but the other two were too sick to travel at that time. They now want to come to the UK, but they have been told that they must have DNA tests before they will be allowed entry—even though they were granted entry visas in 1993. I could cite case after case of families who are being kept apart in similar circumstances.

At the beginning of my speech I cited the case of children who have been left unaccompanied in this country because their parents are unable to join them. Family members have been separated because they have applied for asylum in different European countries. There is no simple mechanism for allowing those people to be reunited or for dealing with their applications together, which would seem to be the obvious way of addressing the problem.

I mentioned earlier the case of a Sri Lankan man who had been tortured. In his application for asylum, he wrote:

"I chose this country to seek asylum because I felt that Britain promotes and protects the human rights of the oppressed people and would consider my case sympathetically and grant me refugee status."

I very much doubt whether he would say that now, four years later, and he certainly will not say it again until his family are allowed to join him.

2.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): I welcome very much the spirit in which the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) has presented his arguments. He is extremely concerned about the issue, which I know affects many of his constituents. If I do not agree with all of his requests, it is not because I do not respect the spirit of his arguments.

The Government's policy for family reunion in asylum cases seeks to find a balance between our wider aim of keeping a firm downward pressure on immigration and our wish to avoid the unnecessary separation of families. That balance informs our policy and it encapsulates the reasons why we cannot go as far as the hon. Gentleman would like. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand also that I cannot comment on the individual cases that he has raised, which are familiar to me.

The Government fully accept and comply with the United Kingdom's obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees. All asylum claims are carefully considered by specially trained staff and, under the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, all those refused asylum have an appeal to an independent adjudicator before they can be removed. However, the United Kingdom has no responsibility to encourage or to assist would-be asylum seekers around the world to come here. Such a commitment is not part of our international obligations and could not in practice be honoured, given the powerful migration pressures in the world today.

The asylum statistics provide striking confirmation of those pressures. The House will recall the dramatic surge in 1991, when the number of asylum applications in the United Kingdom rose from 8,000 to 45,000 in a single year. The numbers fell back over the next two years but are now rising again sharply. The figure for 1994—33,000—was 40 per cent. up on the previous year and the numbers are currently still rising.

I have noticed a tendency in some quarters for the terms "asylum seeker" and "refugee" to be used interchangeably. This is deeply misleading. The reality is that the overwhelming majority of applicants do not have valid claims under the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention. Over the past three years, on average only about 5 per cent. of asylum claims have been accepted by the Home Office, and about 80 per cent. of the decisions have been outright refusals.

The great majority of Home Office decisions are subsequently upheld by the independent adjudicators. In those circumstances, policy must be directed towards expedited decision–taking and minimising the factors that might attract people to the United Kingdom to make unfounded claims here. Such a policy is needed not only in the interests of immigration control but in fairness to genuine refugees, some of whom were described by the hon. Member for Walthamstow, who have to wait longer for recognition of their status because of the large number of groundless claims that have to be processed.

That is why the Government introduced the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. The purpose of the Act was to enable unfounded applications to be determined quickly and with finality while continuing to protect genuine refugees. The Act allowed us to bring down decision times for new claims from more than 18 months to around seven months. Fingerprinting has allowed us to cut out the problem of multiple applications by people seeking to claim benefit in more than one identity. More efficient procedures introduced after the Act now allow us to take more than 2,000 decisions every month.

Last year's sharp rise in asylum claims has, however, outpaced the improvements in output and productivity. Decision times have started rising, and the appeal system is failing to keep pace with its intake. If we fail to respond robustly, growing delays could themselves help to attract unmeritorious asylum claims to the disbenefit of, among others, genuine asylum applicants.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary therefore announced two further important initiatives last month. First, we are now making wider use, in appropriate cases, of the power under the 1993 Act to curtail existing leave when refusing an asylum claim. Where leave is curtailed, people who claim asylum after admission on some other basis have only one right of appeal if the claim is refused, instead of two.

Secondly, we intend to invest £37 million over the next three years in the machinery for determining asylum claims and appeals. Those resources will enable many more claims to be finally determined. In answer to the hon. Gentleman, it is too early to say how the 150 extra staff will be deployed. No decision has yet been taken. By the end of the three years, we expect to have saved well over £100 million, which would have otherwise been spent in Department of Social Security income support and other benefits for failed asylum seekers.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor are also examining a study of asylum appeal procedures by the consultants KPMG Peat Marwick. It is clear from the consultants' report, a copy

of which has been placed in the Library, that there is scope for further action to reduce delays and adjournments. The combined effect of those measures will be to speed up decisions and appeals and bring backlogs under control, but we are continuing to monitor the position closely, and will not hesitate to take further measures if the need arises.

Against that background, our policy on family reunion draws a clear distinction between asylum seekers whose applications are under consideration, people to whom we have granted refugee status and people who do not qualify for asylum but to whom exceptional leave has been granted.

Taking asylum seekers first, I have to tell the House that I see no merit in the argument that those who have applied for asylum should be entitled to bring their families to this country while their claim is being considered. Supporters of that view have not appreciated, and have failed in my view, to confront the true scale and nature of the asylum pressures that we face. Such a policy would be wholly inconsistent with the fact that the great majority of applications are unfounded, would represent a major new incentive to seek asylum in this country, and would thus run directly counter to the Government's wider asylum policy.

The immigration rules already provide that, where the asylum seeker is accompanied by a spouse and minor children, they may be included in the asylum claim. In such circumstances, they can, of course, remain with the principal applicant while the claim is considered. I do not see a case for any extension of that position.

The position is entirely different where an asylum seeker has been recognised as a refugee. The principle of family unity for refugees is contained in the final Act of the instrument that established the 1951 convention. Although family reunion does not form part of the convention itself, the United Kingdom will normally permit the reunion of the immediate family, as a concession outside the immigration rules.

Under that policy, people recognised as refugees immediately become eligible to be joined by their spouse and minor children, provided that they had lived together as a family before the sponsor travelled to seek asylum. Families of refugees are not required to satisfy the maintenance and accommodation requirements that normally apply when families seek admission to join a sponsor here. Other dependent relatives may be admitted if there are compelling compassionate circumstances.

The third category is those who are not at risk of persecution in the terms of the 1951 convention, and do not therefore qualify for asylum, but to whom exceptional leave is granted on other compelling humanitarian grounds. Exceptional leave, which is granted in about 15 per cent. of cases, is a discretionary and temporary status. It is not until a person has been in this country for a substantial period that the likelihood of his or her having a long-term future here can be assessed. We are therefore not normally prepared to entertain an application for family reunion until four years have elapsed. At that point, we expect applicants to meet the normal requirements of the immigration rules, including the requirement that relatives coming to join the sponsor should be maintained and accommodated without recourse to public funds.

I have listened carefully to the case made by the hon. Member for Walthamstow in favour of relaxing the four-year requirement. I have received similar representations in recent months from the Refugee Council and other bodies. I acknowledge that ours is a strict policy and that hard cases may arise. We are prepared to consider family reunion earlier than four years if there are compelling compassionate circumstances.

It is, however, important to emphasise that exceptional leave is a status normally granted to people to whom we have no legal or international obligation, and who often have no particular claims on this country. I therefore remain to be convinced that any change in our current policy would be justified.

At a time when, as I have already mentioned, asylum pressures on the United Kingdom are growing, it would send entirely the wrong signals. It would make the United Kingdom a more attractive destination for migrants, and those to whom we granted exceptional leave would have less incentive to return home when conditions improve. Nor can I see any reason to treat the relatives of an asylum seeker or someone with exceptional leave who have managed to travel to another European Union country any more favourably than those remaining in their home country.

The hon. Member has raised the question of unaccompanied children. The immigration rules make special provision for unaccompanied children seeking asylum, emphasising that particular priority and care should be given to their cases, with close attention to the welfare of the child at all times, and that children should be interviewed only if sufficient information cannot be obtained by other means. Staff considering asylum applications from unaccompanied children receive special training from the Refugee Council.

Even where children are not recognised as refugees, their cases are considered sympathetically and we would return them to their own country only where we were satisfied that there were satisfactory care arrangements there. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is routinely informed of all refusal decisions and may become a party to an appeal.

The information available suggests that the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum is growing. Not all of them will be genuine refugees. Some will have been sent by their families for economic or other reasons. In those cases, it is right for the family to accept responsibility for the children, who will be reunited with their families abroad where possible.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that, although I am not able to offer him the comfort that he would like, the changes that we announced recently will have the great beneficial effect of speeding up the process of dealing with asylum applications. That speeding up will have the greatest possible benefit, particularly for genuine asylum seekers about whom the hon. Gentleman is most concerned.

I also remind the hon. Gentleman that, in respect of those on exceptional leave to remain, we are prepared to consider cases with discretion. With those words, I hope that—

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 6 March 1995

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. A. K. Talwar

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he would make a statement on the circumstances of the dismissal of Mr. A. K. Talwar from his post as a junior doctor at Craigavon area hospital in July 1992.

Mr. Moss: It is inappropriate for Ministers to become involved or comment on a matter which rests between the employer and the individual concerned. The question has been copied to the chairman of Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust, who has undertaken to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: At 1 January 1994, 1,300 staff in the Northern Ireland civil service—4.3 per cent. of the service—self-reported a disability. Of these 476,—1.6 per cent. of the service—were, or had been, registered as disabled. In addition, 81 registered disabled people are working in the Northern Ireland civil service under the employment support programme.

Of the home civil service staff in the Northern Ireland Office, one person is known to be registered disabled—0.45 per cent. of the work force.

Social Security Policy

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will detail the main differences in the application of social security policy in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moss: Northern Ireland maintains parity with Great Britain on social security policy and legislation. The social security schemes and the conditions for receiving them are therefore the same as those which apply in Great Britain, except in respect of council tax benefit legislation.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Redundant Churches, Lancashire

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, how many redundant churches there are in Lancashire which are earmarked for sale.

Mr. Alison: Three redundant churches and one redundant church site in Lancashire are earmarked for sale.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Custody Statistics

Mr. Straw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the number and percentage of defendants remanded in custody and committed for trial at the Crown court who were dealt with within 16 weeks in each year since the Prosecution of Offences (Custody Time Limits) Regulations 1987 came into force.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information about the statutory time limits is not collected in the form requested. However, of the 23,749 defendants remanded in custody awaiting trial who were dealt with during 1994, 74.2 per cent.—about 17,630 defendants—waited less than 16 weeks. It is not possible to provide an accurate comparable figure for earlier periods.

Legal Aid

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has for improving control over the granting of criminal legal aid in magistrates courts.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A number of measures are in hand. In particular, the Lord Chancellor has today laid before Parliament regulations requiring justices clerks to keep records of all applications for criminal legal aid, showing the reasons for deciding whether individual applications should be granted or refused. These regulations will come into force on 1 May 1995.

Lay Representation

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary; Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to extend the provisions for lay advocacy in the county courts; and when a timetable for this project will be set.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The situation is under review. If proposals to extend the current arrangements for lay representation in the county courts are pursued, they would be put out to public consultation.

Civil Proceedings

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to ensure that civil proceedings in respect of which the causes of action arise in the counties of Clwyd, Gwynedd, Powys and Cheshire can be tried at all stages within the Mold/Chester group of courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Rules of court govern the venue for commencement of civil proceedings. Once a case is under way it may be automatically transferred to the court where the defendant lives, or, by order of a judge, to any other court. In the light of these rules, it is not possible to say that all cases where the cause of action arises in the counties listed will be tried in the Mold/Chester group of courts.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future venues for civil proceedings in respect of which the causes of action arise in the counties of Clwyd, Gwynedd, Powys and Cheshire.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no current proposals to change the venue rules. Any proposed changes in the future will be subject to the usual consultation process.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Border Controls

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, columns *394–95*, if Her Majesty's Government are seeking to be orally represented in their own right before the European Court of Justice at the oral hearing requested by the Commission in the matter regarding the abolition of border controls.

Mr. David Davis: We have submitted our written observations to the court, and intend to attend the oral hearing.

EU Human Rights Budget

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the size of the European Union approved budget for human rights work in countries in transition; and if groups in Hong Kong may apply for the use of this money.

Mr. Goodlad: The European Parliament added a new "remark" to the 1995 budget line B7-5240 to the effect that the budget line could be used to

"promote the protection of human rights in countries where there is soon to be a change of sovereignty."

We understand that the budget line, which is available for subsidies to certain activities of organisations pursuing human rights objectives, will be worth about 5 million ecu. It is for the European Commission to consider how much, if any, of this money will be spent on territories referred to by the European Parliament's remark. We understand that groups in Hong Kong may be eligible to apply for the use of this money.

Gibraltar

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar as to holding a constitutional conference to consider reforms to the 1969 constitution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: None. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs confirmed to the Chief Minister in a letter on 13 February that he would be willing to listen to the views of Gibraltarians and the Gibraltar Government on how the constitution might be developed. But we have always made clear that any changes would have to be realistic in the circumstances of Gibraltar.

Turkey

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent evaluation Her Majesty's Government have conducted in respect of the human rights situation in Turkey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: Turkey's human rights performance has long given cause for concern. We monitor the situation closely and take every opportunity to express our concerns to the Turkish authorities and to point out the need for reform.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received in the last three years from Kurdish groups situated in the United Kingdom regarding the position of Kurds living in Turkey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We have received numerous representations in the last three years from Kurdish groups situated in the United Kingdom regarding the position of Kurds living in Turkey. We take every opportunity to make clear to the Turkish authorities our concern at the human rights abuses arising from the conflict in south-east Turkey.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received about the position of Kurds living in Turkey in the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We have received numerous representations in the last three years about the position of Kurds living in Turkey. We take every opportunity to make known to the Turkish authorities our concern at the human rights abuses arising from the conflict in south-east Turkey.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he proposes to make to the Turkish authorities regarding the recent failure of six Kurdish Members of Parliament to have their appeal upheld; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The Kurdish Members of Parliament exercised their right to appeal against the sentences imposed on them in Ankara last December. We understand no date has yet been set for a further hearing.

Global Sex Trade

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise the issue of global sex trade in women and children at *(a)* the United Nations conference on women in Beijing and *(b)* the UN social summit in Copenhagen.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The draft declaration and programme of action to be negotiated at the world summit for social development in Copenhagen already address the issue of sexual exploitation. We support this and hope that such language will be strengthened at the fourth world conference on women in Beijing later this year.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met Amre Moussa, Foreign Minister of Egypt, to discuss the Lockerbie situation; and what contact he has had since.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have regular discussions with the Egyptian Foreign Minister, most recently on 21 November 1994.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs following his undertaking given in Glasgow on 3 February to look into the claims made by the Bradford police surgeon, Dr. David Fieldhouse, what action he has taken to verify Dr. Fieldhouse's claims about the body count at Lockerbie on 21, 22 and 23 December 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs undertook to look into the apparent difference between a reply he gave to a question from the hon. Member for Linlithgow during the Adjournment debate on 1 February and Dr. Fieldhouse's subsequent statement. He wrote to Dr. Fieldhouse on 13 February explaining the basis for his reply. He has also written to the hon. Member about this issue.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has sought from Juge Bruguière in France, in relation to the UTA case, with particular reference to support for a Libyan connection for Lockerbie.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have had regular contact with Juge Bruguière about the UTA case ever since he began his inquiry, in the course of which he has issued warrants in respect of several Libyan nationals.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will enter into discussions with Dr. Esmat Abdul Meguid with a view to resolving the Lockerbie case.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I discussed the Lockerbie issue with Dr. Meguid, the Secretary General of the Arab League, in November 1994. Her Majesty's ambassador at Cairo has regular discussions with Dr Meguid.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs following the court case, Air Malta *v.* Granada Television, and pursuant to the Prime Minister's answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *558*, what evidence has been found to substantiate a Malta connection with the Lockerbie bombing.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Two Libyan nationals are accused of having placed, or having caused to be placed, the bomb which destroyed flight PA 103 on board an Air Malta flight from Luqa airport on 21 December 1988. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I cannot comment on the detail of the evidence against the two accused while criminal proceedings are pending. The recent out-of-court settlement between Air Malta and Granada Television has no bearing on the prosecution case against the two accused. I understand that the story in relation to which Air Malta brought the action was based on allegations different in detail from those contained in the warrants for the arrest of the two Libyans accused.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given to evidence involving officials of countries other than Libya in relation to Lockerbie; and what efforts Her Majesty's Government have made to obtain such evidence concerning nationals of countries, other than Libya, undertaken on 20 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *159*.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Lockerbie investigators have given exhaustive consideration to all information relevant to the Lockerbie bombing. The possible involvement by nationals of a number of countries has been very closely investigated. Despite the unprecedented scale of the investigation, the available evidence does not support charges against the nationals of any country besides Libya. But the investigation remains open and any relevant new information will be considered.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason Her Majesty's Government supported the United States decision that the Montreal convention, requiring attempts at conciliation and arbitration, should not be applied in relation to Pan Am 103 and Lockerbie; and what the preferred action was through the UN Security Council.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The question of the applicability of the Montreal convention is pending before the International Court of Justice. We and the US Government referred to the UN Security Council Libya's failure to surrender the two accused of the Lockerbie bombing in view of the frequently expressed concerns of the United Nations about the effect of terrorism on international peace and security.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had from Esmat Abdul Meguid on the issue of Libya's position in relation to the Lockerbie case.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *497*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the German Government the refusal of the Federal Republic of Germany to join the United States and United Kingdom indictment in respect of Lockerbie; and what grounds Volke Rath, the German public prosecutor, gave for the decision.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Lockerbie bombing was a crime committed against a United States aircraft over Scotland. It is logical and right that the trial of those accused should take place in one of those two countries. I understand that Mr Rath has stated that he does not have sufficient evidence against the two accused to bring proceedings in Germany. In so stating, he was merely referring to the evidence available to him as part of the investigation by him as the state prosecutor at Frankfurt.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice was sought from Her Majesty's Government by the German Government on the reply that they should give to the letter to Bundeskanzler Helmut Kohl, in German, from a German national, Elizabeth Mosey, mother of a Lockerbie victim, of 23 January; and what advice was given by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has given to the Council of Europe Assembly following the enquiries of 25 January from the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), about the accuracy of British information in relation to Lockerbie and Libya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I replied to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) on 6 February.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 1058, on Lockerbie, whether he will place in the Library the

records of the exchanges between the Scottish Police and the Bundeskriminalamt and the Verfassungschutz on this issue of whether Scottish detectives could directly question Mr. Ghadanfar and Mr. Dalkomoni in relation to the destruction of Pan Am 103.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There was no question of Scottish detectives directly questioning these persons. In common with many countries, Germany does not permit foreign investigators to conduct interviews on individuals in Germany, but permits interviews to be carried out at the request of foreign authorities by German police, prosecutors or judges as appropriate.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he took on reports emanating from the East German News Agency, broadcast by English News from Moscow, that the type of fuse used in the Lockerbie bombing was one of a small number made by a Swiss firm, which went to the East Germans.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am not aware of the reports to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It would in any event be inappropriate to comment on details of investigative steps taken while criminal proceedings are pending.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his letter of 9 December 1993 to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, if he will discuss with the German Government the visit to Germany of the Iranian Intelligence Minister, Mr. Fallahian, and subsequent visits by Iranian Ministers at which the destruction of Pan Am 103 was discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have regular discussions with the German Government on a wide range of issues of mutual interest. I am not aware that the destruction of Pan Am 103 has been the subject of discussion between the German authorities and Mr. Fallahian.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the basis for his assertion on 3 February at the Scottish Oils Club's annual dinner that a trial relating to Lockerbie would be prejudiced by a public inquiry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There has already been a public inquiry into the circumstances of the deaths—the fatal accident inquiry held from October 1990 to February 1991. A further public inquiry could hardly fail to encroach upon areas of evidence which can only properly be made public in the context of a criminal trial, where the accused are legally represented and are able to test the strength of the evidence. The public examination of such areas of evidence in any other public forum prior to the criminal trial would prejudice any future prosecution.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the statements by the Government of Iran in the possession of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that the skies would rain blood on America, as a result of the shooting down of an Iranian Airbus by the USS Vincennes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My Department does not have in its possession any such formal statements by the Government of Iran. However, we are aware of an unattributed comment on similar lines broadcast on Tehran Radio in July 1988.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was last in contact with the Government of Finland about the identity of a caller to the US embassy in Helsinki on 5 December 1988, warning that within two weeks a bomb would be carried on to an American airliner from Frankfurt, destination New York.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The credibility of this warning was examined by police officers involved in the Lockerbie investigation, who travelled to Helsinki for this purpose. It was discounted at an early stage of the investigation. We have not therefore pursued this further with the Finnish Government.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he is giving to the death of a British subject, Mr. Prazak, on 22 December 1992, on a Libyan airliner on an internal flight in the light of approaches from Mrs. Felicity Prazak, a British citizen.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I was very sad to hear of Mr. Prazak's death. In March 1994 permission was granted for settlement of insurance claims due to families of victims of the crash.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's communications with the solicitors of Pan Am, Windels, Marx, Davies and Ives, regarding aspects of the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It would not be proper to comment on such communications.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February, to the right hon. Member for Tweedale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), *Official Report*, column 1062, what further assessment he has made, following the letter of 3 February from Professor R. Black of the Law Faculty of Edinburgh university on whether legislation would be necessary to allow those suspected of the Lockerbie crime to be tried elsewhere than Scotland or the United States of America.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I replied to Professor Black on 28 February. The question of whether legislation might be necessary to facilitate a trial of the two accused outside Scotland or the United States is in any event immaterial. They should appear before the appropriate United Kingdom or United States court, as confirmed by the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conclusions he has drawn from the case of Air Malta *v.* Granada Television in relation to Lockerbie.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Two Libyan nationals are accused of having placed, or having caused to be placed, the bomb which destroyed flight PA 103 on board an Air Malta flight from Luqa Airport on 21 December 1988. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I cannot comment on the detail of the evidence against the two accused while criminal proceedings are pending. The recent out-of-court settlement between Air Malta and Granada Television has no bearing on the prosecution case against the two accused. I understand that the story in relation to which Air Malta brought the action was based on allegations different in detail from those contained in the warrants for the arrest of the two Libyans accused.

Abdul Ghadanfar

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date Her Majesty's Government were informed by the German Government of the decision to free Abdul Ghadanfar in November 1994.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is not normal practice for one Government to inform another about the release from its prison of the nationals of third countries, unless there are outstanding judicial requests concerning particular individuals. Since no such requests existed in the case of Mr. Ghadanfar, there was no reason for the German Government to inform us of his release.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he was informed of and consulted about the release of and the decision to free Abdul Ghadanfar by the German authorities in November 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is not normal practice for one Government to inform another about the release from its prison of the nationals of third countries, unless there are outstanding judicial requests concerning particular individuals. Since no such requests existed in the case of Mr. Ghadanfar, there was no reason for the German Government to inform us of his release.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the request by the Scottish police to interview Abdul Ghadanfar was transmitted to the German Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Disclosure of the fact that Messrs Ghadanfar and Dalkamouni were interviewed was an exceptional step taken only because of the unwarranted criticisms which had been, and were continuing to be, made of the German authorities and the Scottish police. It would not be appropriate to go beyond this by discussing details of confidential communications between the Scottish police and prosecuting authorities and their counterparts in Germany, or indeed in any other country.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: As at 1 January 1995, the percentage of registered disabled people employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration and its agency, was 0.71 per cent. Figures for non-registered disabled people in the FCO-ODA are not available.

Sanctions (Libya)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which states on the continent of Africa support UN sanctions against Libya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: When Security Council resolution 883, which strengthened sanctions against Libya, was adopted in November 1993, Cape Verde then President of the Security Council voted in favour of the resolution; Dijbouti and Morocco abstained. Egypt and Sudan were also in attendance, without the right to vote, and both spoke against the resolution. There has been no relevant vote at the UN since then.

Treaty on European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library those sections of the report of Her Majesty's Government under section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 concerning the social economic and environmental goals specified in article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" form the report to Parliament for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities Amendment Act. In order to comply with the requirements of articles 103(3) and 104c of the treaty on European Union, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor wrote to Mr. de Silguy at the European Commission on 2 March 1995, enclosing copies of the Budget statement, the 1995–96 FSBR, the March 1995 excessive deficits return and the information required under section 4 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993. A copy of this letter with attachments has been placed in the Library.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest available figures show that 14 staff employed by my Department, excluding our two agencies, identified themselves as disabled. This represents 3.8 per cent. of all staff.

DEFENCE

Outside Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the mechanism whereby staff in his Department report approaches from outside employers offering employment; and how these reports of approaches or job offers are differentiated from applications under the business appointment rules.

Mr. Freeman: Staff considering any approach from an outside employer offering employment for which approval would be required under the business appointment rules are required to report the approach to an officer two grades higher in their line management chain. Staff in sections concerned with procurement or contract work are required to report any such approach whether or not they are considering taking it up. Applications to accept outside appointments require the completion of a detailed application form and are considered centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff working in sections concerned with procurement or contract work, and at what grades, have left his Department since February 1993 *(a)* to retire and *(b)* to take other employment.

Mr. Freeman: Our records do not categorise retirements and resignations by the type of work in which the individuals were last engaged. In any event, staff, other than very senior staff, are not required to advise the Department of their future employment plans except where this involves certain types of employment such as defence-related industries or companies with which they have had official contact during their service with the Department.

Procurement

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many persons and at what grades, work in sections concerned with procurement or contract work.

Mr. Freeman: No central record is kept of the number of staff in my Department who are wholly or partly employed in the many areas concerned with procurement, and the information could not therefore be provided. The numbers and grades at executive officer level and above in sections, other than those in the separate defence agencies, directly involved with contracts work are as follows:

Grade	*Number employed*
Grade 3	1
Grade 4	3
Grade 5	18
Grade 6	46
Grade 7	56
SEO	172
HEO	368
EO	540

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was his response to the communication sent by Colonel James Sullivan of the office of the Secretary of the United States Air Force on 17 November 1994 concerning the destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie.

Mr. Soames: None. My right hon. and learned Friend received no such communication.

Maurice Callejas

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence between what dates Maurice Callejas served in the Royal Artillery.

Mr. Soames: Although it is not normally our practice to disclose such information, my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence would be happy to look into any matters concerning this individual if the hon. Member were to write to him with the background.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department monitors its civilian staff to gather data on those who have a disability, for which they may or may not be registered. The results from the monitoring show that, on 1 October last year, 5.1 per cent. of the civilian staff employed by the Ministry of Defence and its agencies has some form of disability. Of these, 1.3 per cent. were registered disabled.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold open meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises without commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether, in each of the above categories, this is (i) under statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary.

Mr. Soames: Of the advisory non departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department, the advisory committee on conscientious objectors holds open meetings on a voluntary basis, for which it publishes agendas.

Falklands War

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the differentials between levels of compensatory payments made to officers and other ranks for deaths and serious injuries suffered in the Falklands War; and what steps have been taken since to reduce these differentials.

Mr. Soames: The armed forces pension scheme administered by my Department provides occupational pension benefits for the eligible dependants of those killed in war, and to personnel who are invalided from service as a result of injuries sustained in war.

The invaliding and dependants' pension benefits for personnel injured or killed due to service are paid at enhanced levels to provide a guaranteed minimum level of income. The rates of pension are based on representative rates of pay for each rank, since AFPS benefits, like many other occupational pension schemes, are salary-related. The level of award for those attributably invalided also takes into account the degree of disability. There will therefore be differences in the level of awards for all ranks, whether they are officers or other ranks.

Invalidity and death benefits for service personnel are being considered in a general review of the AFPS being undertaken at present as part of the independent review of armed forces' manpower, career and remuneration structures by Mr. Michael Bett.

War disability pensions, which are administered by the Department of Social Security, are not rank related; they are based solely on the degree of disablement.

UNPROFOR

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has held on the continuing presence of UNPROFOR forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina with General Sir Michael Rose since he relinquished his command there, with particular reference to the implications for the safety of this mission of President Tudjman's call for the withdrawal of UNPROFOR from Croatia on 31 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend took the opportunity to discuss a wide range of issues on the

former Yugoslavia with General Rose when he returned to the United Kingdom.

Appeals

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of appeals for redress of complaint concerning the scale of redundancy entitlement for ex-service personnel which are currently outstanding; what is the average time taken to process such appeals; and when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for East Lothian dated 23rd May 1994 about Mr. Eric Wright.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* There are at present 101 applications outstanding. These were received in my Department between May and December last year.

The length of time being taken to process these appeals reflects the need to ensure consistent treatment for each individual in the light of all the circumstances. I am afraid that consideration of these cases is not yet complete. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will send a substantive reply to the hon. Member as soon as the Army board has reached its conclusions.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Research

40. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to review research allocations to reduce the development gap which he identified to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology.

Mr. David Hunt: Over the next few months I shall be reviewing with colleagues the implications of "Technology Foresight" on departmental science and technology programmes.

Government Structure

41. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress his Department has made in the past 12 months on changing the structure of Government.

Mr. Horam: In the past 12 months, 12 next steps agencies have been created and one civil service body has been privatised. In the 12 months to September 1994, over 400 activities worth a total of £1 billion were reviewed under the "Competing for Quality" programme resulting in savings worth about £275 million a year. All this is indicative of the Government's continued determination to strive for ever greater efficiency and effectiveness within the civil service.

Citizens Charter

42. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement setting out the areas of which the citizens charter will be extended.

Mr. Horam: The charter already applies to all public services, but we continually seek to extend charter principles to raise all those services to the quality of the best. For example, this year we are seeking user nominations for the charter mark awards. This should make users more conscious of the standards of services they receive, and increase customer pressure for improvements in poorer quality organisations.

Women

43. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the annual budget for the development unit set up by his Department to promote women into science, engineering and technology.

Mr. David Hunt: The unit is an integral part of the Office of Science and Technology. We need to attract the best people into science, engineering and technology—men and women. The unit has an important role to play in this and will have the funding it needs.

Civil Service Morale

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to improve morale within the civil service.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government take very seriously indeed the need to maintain high morale in the civil service. In the Command Paper on the civil service, published in January, the Government set out policies which they believe will maintain and improve morale by providing a framework within which civil servants can give of their best.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 1 February *Official Report*, column *712*.

Human Genes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has in respect of research which has been carried out to date in the United Kingdom in respect of isolating human genes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Medical Research Council, which receives its funding from my Department, supports an extensive programme of work on the isolation and characterisation of human genes under the human genome mapping project initiative. Research is being carried out at the HGMP research centre in Cambridge, at MRC funded units—for example, the human genetics unit in Edinburgh—and through grant support to researchers in universities. In 1993–94, the council's expenditure on this research was £5.6 million, and work to exploit the fruits of this activity is being carried out under the council's "Genetic Approach to Human Health Initiative".

Considerable progress has been, and continues to be made in this area. A number of genes have already been isolated by council-supported scientist, including, for example, the gene for polycystic kidney disease.

Officials from the MRC are always willing to discuss and consider scientifically based, sound proposals. The prospects for funding of research into the isolation of

human genes will therefore depend on the nature and quality of any applications received.

Personal Records

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, further to the information provided in paragraph 4.23 of his Department's 1995 report and expenditure plans, when he expects to publish the draft legislation on access to personal records and health and safety information.

Mr. David Hunt: Proposals for legislation on access to personal records and health and safety information will be introduced when the parliamentary timetable permits.

Ministerial Accountability

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to arrange further ministerial accountability for agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Horam: Ministers are accountable for all the work of their Departments, including agencies. The Government's position was set out fully in Command Paper 2748, including the response to the TCSC conclusions.

ENVIRONMENT

Cemfuel

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those instances in 1994 where permissions to burn Cemfuel was refused.

Mr. Atkins *[pursuant to his reply, 24 February 1995, c. 350]:* I regret that one of the locations given was incorrect. The two plants which use Cemfuel are Castle Cement at Clitheroe and Ketton. Limited trials have taken place at these sites. There has been no other formal application to burn Cemfuel.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the amount of Cemfuel burnt *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Lancashire in 1994.

Mr. Atkins *[pursuant to his reply, 14 February 1995, c. 350]:* I regret that the figures given were incorrect. The total estimated quantity of Cemfuel used in England in 1994 was 37,000 tonnes, of which 34,000 was used in Lancashire.

Carbon Emissions Report

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the DRI/McGraw-Hill report on carbon emissions across Europe, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has no record of having received the report. I am, however, aware of its conclusions, which the Government do not share.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest there are now, and how many there were five years ago.

Sir Paul Beresford: At 31 March 1990, there was 3404 SSSIs in England. AT 31 March 1994, the latest date for which figures have been published there were 3794.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by location all sites of special scientific interest in England and Wales.

Sir Paul Beresford: English Nature produces a list of sites of special scientific interest by county. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library. Matters relating to Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. However, I understand that the Countryside Council for Wales produces similar information on request.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of people who have applied for career breaks is not available, but the number of such breaks, by gender, in the period January 1990 to December 1994 were four men and one hundred and thirty one women, none of whom have had their employment terminated.

Opencast Coal Mining

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the plans for opencast coal mining in Oxfordshire were submitted.

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally.

Bridleways

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to extend and develop the network of bridleways in England.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have endorsed the target to ensure that the whole network of footpaths, bridleways and byways open to all traffic is properly maintained and recorded on definitive maps by the year 2000. The Secretary of State was also pleased recently to approve the Countryside Commission's proposals for the Pennine bridleway national trial.

Local authorities have powers to create bridleways by agreement or order. While the provision of facilities for specific recreational activities is a matter for local authorities to consider, planning policy guidance note 17 encourages them to include in local plans policies and proposals on the availability of rights of way.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1994, the combined percentage of registered and non-registered disabled people employed in my Department was equivalent to 2 per cent. of total non-industrial staff, excluding PSAS.

Environmental Assessment

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to amend the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 in respect of development requiring environmental assessment.

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have today laid before Parliament the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 and the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. These two instruments consolidate the General Development Order 1988 and its numerous amending orders. Following public consultation in 1993, the Permitted Development Order also introduces provisions whereby permitted development rights granted by article 3 of the order are withdrawn for development that should be subject to environmental assessment. It is proposed that the measures will come into force on 3 June 1995. From that date, permitted development rights will no longer apply to the types of projects listed in schedule 1 to the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988, the EA regulations, or to developments within any of the categories in schedule 2 to the EA Regulations if they would be likely to have significant environmental effects unless, for example, other procedures associated with those developments provide for environmental assessment. We anticipate that only a small number of developments will be affected by these changes, since most projects carried out under permitted development rights are minor and would not be expected to have significant environmental effects.

My right hon. Friends have also today laid before Parliament the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Assessment and Permitted Development) Regulations 1995. These, too, are proposed to come into force on 3 June 1995. Under the regulations a developer may apply to the local planning authority for an opinion on whether a particular development, which would otherwise benefit from permitted development rights, will require environmental assessment, and consequently a planning application.

A developer receiving an opinion from the planning authority that environmental assessment is required may appeal to the Secretary of State for a direction. Where the local authority is both the developer and planning authority, or where someone proposes a joint development with a local authority, an opinion on the need for EA may be sought from the Secretary of State.

Guidance to local planning authorities and developers on the effect and operation of the new measures is to be issued in the next few days.

Copies of the 67 non-confidential responses to the consultation paper have been placed in the Department of the Environment and Welsh Office libraries, and a summary and list of the responses have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses together with a compliance cost assessment.

Landfill

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to produce guidance on the design, construction and operation of landfills.

Mr. Atkins: Landfill is the predominant method of waste disposal in this country, and will remain of major importance as far into the future as we can see. Landfills, unless they are properly designed, built and operated, can have a major impact on the atmosphere, the soil and the water supply. Unless we ensure that landfill uses the best possible techniques, we shall have failed the test of sustainability.

We are therefore publishing today a consultation draft of waste management paper 26B, "Landfill design, construction and operational practice". The draft paper has been prepared by consultants. They have drawn extensively on the waste management industry's experience of landfill techniques, on the waste regulators' particular skills, and on their own specialised knowledge of landfill engineering as a technical discipline.

The consultation period will be until 10 May 1995. Subject to the results of the consultation, waste management paper 26B should be published in late summer 1995.

Deregulation

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for improving local services by streamlining the regulation of local government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Government are determined to remove all unnecessary bureaucratic regulation of local government. As part of this commitment my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have today published a paper for consultation, "Deregulating Local Government".

The paper makes proposals for further specific measures in the following areas of local authority activity: enforcement action, finance and administration, housing, personal social services, and traffic and highways. It also reviews progress to date on freeing up local government from unnecessary bureaucratic requirements, Finally, it invites consultees to put forward their own proposals for further streamlining and reducing the regulation of local government.

Regulatory regimes for local government should be kept to the minimum necessary to safeguard our national policies for services and the management of the economy. This will help local authorities to be responsive to the needs and wishes of their local businesses and citizens, and to provide them with quality services which they want and can afford.

I have arranged for copies of the paper to be placed in the Library. Copies are also being sent to the local authority associations, individual local authorities, and to other interested bodies, all of whom are being invited to respond by 1 May 1995.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the financial benefits to the Exchequer of the privatisation of the water industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 2 March]:* Privatisation allowed the water industry access to private sector funds, removing its dependence on the Exchequer. This has enabled a much increased investment programme of around £3 billion each year since 1989 to improve drinking water quality and the water environment as well as allowing the necessary maintenance of infrastructure. For example, in England and Wales in 1993, 99 per cent. of 3.5 million tests met the drinking water quality and between 1990 and 1993 there was a net upgrading in quality of nearly 16 per cent. of river length—the proportion of rivers in the highest quality class increased and the proportion in the lower classes reduced.

Phosphate Removal

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of removing phosphates from water in England and Wales *(a)* in total and *(b)* by water authority to stop the formation of algal blooms in reservoirs in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: The Department does not collect information of this kind.

Waste

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the management plan setting out his policies on imports and exports of waste.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has today issued for public consultation a draft of the management plan or imports and exports of waste, copies of which have been placed in the Library. This sets out in detail the Government's policies on waste imports and exports, which were outlined in a statement on 15 June last year.

The waste management plan will be an important component in the system of controls over transfrontier movements of waste. It gives guidance to regulators and to industry as to the types of shipment which will in future be allowed into and out of the United Kingdom, and those which will not. In particular, it helps towards achieving the Government's aim of self-sufficiency in waste disposal, both at national and European Community levels. The plan is separate from, but consistent with, the waste strategy for England and Wales, a draft of which was yesterday issued for consultation.

The key proposals of the management plan for imports and exports are:

to ban exports from the UK for disposal to all countries;

to allow exports for recovery to OECD countries, but, in line with decision II/12 taken by the parties to the Basel convention in March 1994, to ban exports of hazardous waste for recovery to non-OECD countries, other than in exceptional cases allowed under that decision;

to ban most imports for disposal, other than exceptionally in the case of hazardous wastes from developing countries which cannot reasonably deal with the wastes themselves, or for small quantities from developed countries where the provision of specialised facilities would be uneconomic. For wastes destined for high temperature incineration, the draft plan incorporates a three-year transitional period during which progressively reducing volumes of imports would be allowed;

to allow imports for recovery, while taking steps to ban imports for disposal under the guise of recovery—so called "sham recovery".

Subject to responses to consultation, it is our aim to publish the plan later in the spring.

EDUCATION

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by her Department, and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The DFE's Department annual disabled person's return for 1994 shows that the number of registered disabled people employed by the Department is 60, representing 2.9 per cent. of the total.

This figure refers only to staff who are registered disabled. There are disabled people employed by the Department who chose not to register, and therefore do not appear in the figures.

Collective Worship

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what considerations underlie the policy of requiring a compulsory act of worship for those school students who are older than the statutory age for school attendance.

Mr. Forth: Collective worship helps to establish a positive ethos in a school community, and makes a vital contribution to pupils' moral and spiritual development.

Mr. Michael Johnson

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she expects to answer the letters from the hon. Member for Bradford, South of 17 October 1994 and 27 January 1995 concerning Mr. Michael Johnson.

Mr. Robin Squire: The letters received holding replies dated 2 November 1994 and 15 February 1995 respectively. A substantive reply to Mr. Johnson's request for the Secretary of State to intervene in his case was sent on 2 March 1995 and, as promised, a copy was sent to the hon. Member for Bradford, South.

Overseas Students

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, (1) if she will publish a table showing *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of overseas students studying for a first degree in every university in the United Kingdom (i) in 1994–95 and (ii) in 1984–85;

(2) if she will publish a table showing *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of overseas students studying for a first degree in every university in the United Kingdom (i) in 1994–95 and (ii) in 1984–85.

Mr. Boswell: The available information, covering both questions on universities in England is shown in the table. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have responsibility for data on students studying in those countries.

Numbers of full-time overseas domiciled students[1] studying at English Universities

	1984–85				1993–94			
	Undergraduates		Postgraduates		Undergraduates		Postgraduates	
	Overseas students	As percentage of all U/Gs	Overseas students[1]	As percentage of all P/Gs	Overseas students	As percentage of all U/Gs	Overseas students	As percentage of all P/Gs
Former UFC Institutions								
Aston	150	5	156	27	257	6	103	26
Bath	139	5	171	26	559	12	173	23
Birmingham	357	5	451	32	882	8	1,085	36
Bradford	191	5	249	39	594	11	428	53
Bristol	243	4	135	17	997	12	438	27
Brunel	41	2	224	49	397	9	280	33
Cambridge	606	6	652	30	864	8	1,723	43
City	314	14	310	40	585	18	487	34
Durham	112	3	123	19	242	4	229	22
East Anglia	286	8	191	31	533	10	281	26
Essex	403	17	316	54	815	21	530	54
Exeter	144	3	175	27	380	6	462	35
Hull	101	2	220	38	651	10	482	40
Keele	258	11	47	14	497	11	168	19
Kent	582	16	197	43	1,299	24	482	44
Lancaster	121	3	218	38	802	12	439	38
Leeds	563	6	607	35	1,275	9	1,059	40
Leicester	89	2	111	13	635	10	388	22
Liverpool	227	3	219	23	597	6	367	24
London Business School	0	0	51	22	0	0	214	48
London University	3,569	12	3,604	37	7,590	17	6,256	41
Loughborough	227	5	352	45	572	8	330	31
Manchester Business School	0	0	46	21	0	0	174	77
Manchester University	536	6	457	26	1,272	10	995	38
Manchester Institute of Science and Technology	432	15	522	49	965	22	753	54
Newcastle	474	7	370	34	789	8	678	39
Nottingham	270	4	158	16	912	10	529	31
Oxford	553	6	793	32	923	9	1,783	45
Reading	271	6	504	43	860	12	1,014	49
Salford	479	15	275	63	555	10	355	50
Sheffield	239	4	269	26	1,268	12	815	36
Southampton	227	4	297	29	522	7	459	30
Surrey	209	8	214	35	580	14	411	42
Sussex	362	11	300	35	1,100	18	477	34
Warwick	275	6	166	25	1,069	14	810	44
York	85	3	111	19	264	6	276	28
Former PCFC Institutions								
Anglia Polytechnic University	83	3	1	3	605	8	21	12
Bournemouth University	30	2	0	0	140	2	111	35
Coventry University	263	9	15	25	1,734	16	270	50
Cranfield University	89	2	4	4	79	59	384	38
De Montfort University	12	11	401	32	480	3	200	32
Hertfordshire University	142	2	31	10	757	8	130	23
Kingston University	152	4	15	12	713	8	43	8
Leeds Metropolitan University	135	3	35	13	509	5	150	20
Liverpool John Moores University	292	6	33	9	550	5	66	15
London Guildhall	269	4	19	6	263	4	22	11
Luton University	63	11	0	0	89	1	11	6
Manchester Metropolitan University	202	2	20	4	951	5	109	8
Middlesex University	927	14	26	14	1,959	16	121	16
Nottingham Trent University	141	2	3	3	709	5	49	9
Oxford Brookes University	136	3	36	10	939	14	136	20
Sheffield Hallam University	65	1	29	9	331	2	84	12
South Bank University	273	6	29	14	639	6	118	14
Staffordshire University	133	3	9	7	422	5	130	34
Thames Valley University	346	12	31	18	409	6	39	28
University of Brighton	231	5	22	10	668	8	41	13

Numbers of full-time overseas domiciled students[1] studying at English Universities

	1984–85				1993–94			
	Undergraduates		Postgraduates		Undergraduates		Postgraduates	
	Overseas students	As percentage of all U/Gs	Overseas students[1]	As percentage of all P/Gs	Overseas students	As percentage of all U/Gs	Overseas students	As percentage of all P/Gs
University of Central England, Birmingham	120	3	8	3	466	5	75	11
University of Central Lancashire	74	2	1	3	134	1	14	4
University of Derby	111	7	0	0	159	2	30	14
University of East London	1,318	26	46	33	1,179	14	76	23
University of Greenwich	333	9	7	16	601	6	26	4
University of Huddersfield	178	4	1	11	374	5	60	10
University of Humberside	275	10	12	18	457	5	76	32
University of North London	376	8	28	17	374	5	30	11
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	108	2	5	2	708	7	84	17
University of Plymouth	137	3	41	27	402	3	142	26
University of Portsmouth	224	3	18	17	855	8	81	21
University of Sunderland	447	11	6	20	735	8	100	25
University of Teesside	193	6	18	15	298	5	44	19
University of West England, Bristol	110	2	9	4	193	2	35	5
University of Westminster	446	11	40	50	334	5	94	22
University of Wolverhampton	112	3	0	0	810	7	48	8

Source:
USR Volume 1—Students and Staff 1984–85 and 1993–94 and the Department's FESR.
Note:
[1] For 1984–85 former UFC institutions, actual postgraduate overseas domiciled student numbers are not available in the required format. Data on students paying Overseas student fees have been used as an approximation.

Youth Service Unit

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the budget for the youth service unit for 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Boswell] *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* In 1993–94, the running costs of the youth service unit amounted to £382,000. It is anticipated that the costs in 1994–95 will be roughly £435,000. The unit's budget for 1995–96 has not yet been fixed. These figures reflect changes in the functions of the unit from year to year.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Pergau Dam

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sums will be available to the aid budget in 1996–97 as a consequence of the decision to fund the Pergau dam and other aid and trade provision projects from reserves.

Mr. Baldry: The planning figure for the 1996–97 aid programme remains as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 29 November 1994. As my right hon. Friend and Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement to the House on 13 December 1994, final figures for the aid programme in 1996–97 and later years will as usual be determined during the annual public expenditure survey in the light of all relevant factors.

Four-wheel Drive Vehicles

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current position of the Overseas Development Administration on the supply of four-wheel drive vehicles to overseas non-governmental organisations; and if priority is given to British products.

Mr. Baldry: We undertake procurement in accordance with aid tying rules agreed with the DTI under which we look to United Kingdom supply sources wherever possible. These rules apply no differently to four-wheel drive vehicles than to any other equipment provided as part of the aid programme. However, our prime concern is to ensure that our programmes, whether operated by ourselves or by NGOs on our behalf, have satisfactory equipment with which to undertake their work where and when they need it.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Attorney General what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The information for the Departments for which I am responsible as at 31 December 1994 is set out in the table. Each of the Law Officers' Departments is an equal opportunities employer.

Departments	*Percentage*
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	—
Crown Prosecution Service	1.30
Serious Fraud Office	2.98
Treasury Solicitor's Department[1]	1.96

[1] The Treasury Solicitor's Department also employs people with disabilities who are not registered but the numbers are not readily available.

WALES

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer on 28 February, *Official Report*, columns *502–3*, on what date his Department was notified of *(a)* the proposal and *(b)* actual payment of the grant by the Cardiff Bay development corporation to Grosvenor Waterside plc for the development of Crickowell house.

Mr. Redwood: My Department was approached by the corporation in July 1991 about a contribution towards infrastructure costs associated with the construction of Crickowell house.

An agreed contribution was paid by the corporation in March 1994.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Dundee East (Mr. McAllion) on 1 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *747*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telephones

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will now make available the BT star services facilities for the telephones of right hon. and hon. Members and their staff throughout the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: There are no plans to do so. I understand that BT star service facilities are designed to be used on public telephone exchange lines and it is not possible to make them available on extensions of the Palace of Westminster's private exchange.

Disabled Parking

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what measures are in place to ensure that facilities for disabled parking within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster are not abused; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: There are 12 parking spaces in Star Chamber Court and three parking spaces in the inner courtyard of Norman Shaw North reserved for the use of vehicles driven, or used by photo-identity pass holders who have registered with the Serjeant at Arms and are recognised as disabled. At present, six hon. Members, eight Members' secretaries and 10 staff of the House have been registered. The use of these spaces is on a first come, first served basis.

Those who use the other parking spaces in Star Chamber Court are reminded not to use the spaces reserved for disabled people. The whole area is policed on a random basis but these arrangements are dependent in the first instance on the co-operation of all right hon. and hon. Members. The Serjeant at Arms has been requested to draw examples of continuing misuse to the attention of the Committee.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will put before the Intelligence and Security Select Committee the evidence which enabled Mrs. Stella Rimington in her Dimbleby lecture to claim that MI5 had assisted in the tracking down and issue of warrants for the culprits of the Lockerbie crime, and to reveal M15's knowledge of threats to airlines at Frankfurt in the period September to December 1988.

Mr. Howard: I have received no such request from the Intelligence and Security Committee.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it was with the authority of his Department that Scotland Yard gave the *Daily Express* a story carried on page 1, 28 February 1989 identifying Khaled Juafor as the man who carried the bomb which destroyed Pan Am 103.

Mr. Howard: My Department had no involvement in the appearance of this story nor, as I understand it, was it based on any authorised briefing by a member of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he authorised Mrs. Stella Rimington to make public statements about Libya and Lockerbie.

Mr. Howard: On the assumption that the hon. Member is referring to remarks made by Mrs. Rimington during her Dimbleby lecture in June 1994. I can confirm that I was aware of the content of the lecture before it was delivered.

Abdul Fatah Ghadanfar

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date it was known to the Home Office that Mr. Ghadanfar was travelling on a false British passport under the name of Mr. Burtle of Redruth.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out in full his information about any false British passport of Abdul Fatah Ghadanfar, born on 12 December 1941 in Irbid, Jordan, alias Ronald John Burtle, born 24 October 1948, Redruth, Cornwall, UK Passport No. CO69456 E.

Mr. Howard: When the West German police arrested Ghadanfar in October 1988, they discovered a passport issued to Mr. Burtle in his possession, and notified the authorities in the United Kingdom. The passport had been

issued a few months before it was reported stolen, which was shortly before Ghadanfar's arrest. It is not known, and thought unlikely, that he ever travelled using this passport.

Extradition

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions over any convenient period in the last 10 years the United Kingdom has extradited British nationals to a country with which the United Kingdom does not have an extradition treaty.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: During the last 10 years, the United Kingdom have not extradited any British nationals to countries with which it has no extradition treaty.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the Libyan Government has asked Her Majesty's Government to extradite British citizens to stand trial in Libya.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Libyan Government have not asked Her Majesty's Government to extradite any British citizen to stand trial in Libya.

Spain

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek from the Spanish authorities information about Spanish pass, K 00023326, and driving licence 77.060.402; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I understand that this information has already been obtained from the Spanish authorities.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Some 0.8 per cent. of staff in the Home Office and its agencies are known to be disabled. There are likely to be others who have not responded to the Department's voluntary surveys.

The nature of many of the posts within the Prison Service limits the scope for employing people with disabilities; excluding Prison Service staff, the percentage of staff in the Home Office and its agencies who are known to be disabled is 2.2 per cent.

Plymouth City Council

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total cost of investigations by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service into allegations against members of Plymouth, Sutton conservative association by Conservative councillors on Plymouth city council.

Mr. Maclean: The Devon and Cornwall constabulary does not normally record the cost of individual investigations, and information on the police costs is not available. I understand that Crown Prosecution Service costs were approximately £180.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken against members of the Plymouth, Sutton Conservative Association by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service following allegations made against them by Conservative city councillors in Plymouth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: This is an operational matter and entirely the responsibility of the chief officer of the police force concerned.

I am told though, that the matter was referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, whose view was that there was no evidence to justify criminal proceedings against any person.

Nottinghamshire Probation Service

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the specific grant cash limit for the Nottinghamshire probation service in 1994–95 and the proposed specific cash limit in 1995–96 in *(a)* cash *(b)* comparable terms.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The specific grant cash limit for 1994–95 for the Nottinghamshire probation service is £6.9 million in cash terms. The specific grant cash limit for 1995–96 is *(a)* £6.7 million in cash terms and *(b)* £6.5 million in real terms compared with the previous year. A further £0.3 million is added to 1995–96 specific grant to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed, and at what grade, by the Nottinghamshire probation service on *(a)* 30 June 1992, *(b)* 30 June 1993 and *(c)* 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information is given in the table.

Staff employed by the Nottinghamshire probation service, in post at 30 June, whole-time equivalent [1], by grade and type. Number of staff, whole time equivalent

	30 June 1992	*30 June 1993*	*30 June 1994*
Probation Officers			
Chief	1	1	1
Deputy Chief	1	1	1
Assistant Chief	6	5	5
Senior	29	31	30
Main grade	146	148	149
Total probation officers	183	186	186
Non-probation grade staff			
Probation Services' Officers[2]	25	32	29
Clerical/secretarial	105	108	109
Administrative	18	16	16
Other non-probation grade staff, excluding hostel staff[3]	39	42	45
Hostel staff	20	20	21
Total non-probation grade staff	207	218	220
Total probation staff	390	404	406

[1]Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.

[2]Formerly ancillaries.

[3]Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Houses of Parliament (Security Staff)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason and on which basis the Commissioner of Police of Metropolis has varied the implied condition in the contracts of employment of the security custodians employed in the Houses of Parliament that granted them the option of continuing their employment until they reached the age of 65 years; if he will arrange to reconsider the decision to vary these employment contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the commissioner that the age of retirement for Metropolitan police civil staff, including security staff at the Palace of Westminster, is and always has been 60 years. Extensions of service beyond that age are at the commissioner's discretion and are based on management needs.

Stolen Computer Equipment

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of the main metropolitan areas the value of reported stolen computer equipment during the last year for which completed figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

EU Border Controls

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement explaining the operation of the border control arrangements within the EU known as the light touch controls; and what plans there are to extend the scope of these operations.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no EU-wide arrangements described in this way.

European Union and other European Economic Area passengers arriving in the United Kingdom are required to present their passport or other national identity documents, in order to establish their nationality and to distinguish them from third country nationals, who are subject to immigration control.

Mentally Disordered Defendants

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the system whereby potential patients of special hospitals are assessed prior to sentence by a court; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Any court, before sentencing may seek psychiatric reports on a defendant. The overall effectiveness of these arrangements has been substantially enhanced by the creation, with the Government's active support, of over 100 local schemes in England and Wales aiming to provide assessment and access to treatment and care for mentally disordered defendants at the earliest opportunity.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the priorities of the Metropolitan police for 1995–96, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The priorities of the Metropolitan police for 1995–96 are:

(i) to deliver the standards defined in the MPS charter;

(ii) to achieve a detection rate for notifiable offences of 20 per cent.;

(iii) to achieve a detection rate for burglary of 15 per cent.;

(iv) to improve performance against robbery, in particular:

(a) increase the detection rate for street crime to 15 per cent.;

(b) increase the detection rate for robberies at business properties to 20 per cent.;

(v) to improve performance against drug-related violence;

(vi) to provide high visibility policing so as to reassure the public.

Details of each of the priorities and the way in which they address the key objectives for policing were given in the statutory instrument I laid before the House on 19 October 1994 and are set out in the Metropolitan police policing plan 1995–96 which the Commissioner is issuing with my approval. I am sending copies to all right hon. and hon. Members whose constituencies fall wholly or partly within the Metropolitan police district and I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

Curfew Orders

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the trials of electronic monitoring of curfew orders are due to begin, when he expects to be able to announce details of the contractors who will be carrying out trials; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I am pleased to announce that Securicor Custodial Services Ltd. will be providing the service in the city of Manchester and the borough of Reading and that Geografix Ltd. will be providing the service for the county of Norfolk. The next stage is acceptance testing of the contractors' equipment and systems. The nine-month trials are scheduled to begin in June.

Gloucestershire Police

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department; pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *407*, if he will publish the advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary relating to the special grant application by the chief constable of Gloucestershire for the exceptional costs of the Cromwell street inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary was that the expenditure incurred was not such as to threaten the efficiency of the force. It is not the practice to publish the details of advice given to Ministers.

North East London Probation Service

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the effect of the November 1993 Budget statement on the budget of the North East London probation service; and what will be the impact on the service of the November 1994 Budget.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1993 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1994–95 for the North East London probation service of £7.2 million, 6.8 per cent. higher than for 1993–94. The 1994 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1995–96 of £7.1 million plus a further £0.2 million to support

probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office.

It is for the North East London probation service to decide how these resources are best used and to determine what specific changes within the service should be undertaken on the basis of the total expenditure limit implied by this level of grant support.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed, and at what grades, by the North East London probation service on 30 June in each of the years 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information is given in the table.

Staff employed by the Nottinghamshire probation service, in post at 30 June, whole-time equivalent, by grade and type. Number of staff, whole time equivalent

	30 June 1992	*30 June 1993*	*30 June 1994*
Probation Officers			
Chief	1	1	1
Deputy Chief	—	—	—
Assistant Chief	3	4	4
Senior	21	21	22
Main grade	102	114	109
Total probation officers	127	140	137
Non-probation grade staff			
Probation Services' Officers[2]	36	40	36
Clerical/secretarial	92	99	101
Administrative	11	13	12
Other non-probation grade staff, excluding hostel staff[3]	10	17	17
Hostel staff	12	17	13
Total non-probation grade staff	161	186	179
Total probation staff	287	326	316

[1]Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.
[2]Formerly ancillaries.
[3]Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Police Guidance Manual

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's definition of severe cases in the new up-dated police guidance manual; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The manual of guidance for the preparation, processing and submission of prosecution files includes no such definition. The manual makes reference to the "serious" nature of a case. This relates to the seriousness of the offence committed and to other factors including the vulnerability of the victim, the use of excessive force and the abuse of a position of responsibility.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Howard: No central record is maintained of applications for career breaks, but since 1992 the Department and its agencies have granted career breaks to 23 men and 220 women. During this period, two members of staff have had their appointment terminated during or following a career break.

Car Break-in Kits

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the sale of car break-in kits; and what response he has given.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has, in the past, received a number of representations from hon. Members about the general availability of skeleton car key sets, which are used to gain entry to locked vehicles.

Since many of those working in the motor trade have a legitimate use for such devices, there would be substantial practical and legal difficulties in restricting or prohibiting their sale. There is, in any case, no evidence to show that skeleton keys are being misused to any significant degree.

Children's Certificates

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children's certificates have been issued to public houses in each local government area of England and Wales to the latest available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The changes to the Licensing Act 1964 which enable licensees to apply to the licensing justices for children's certificates came into effect on 3 January 1995. No information about the number of certificates granted is yet held centrally.

Birmingham Six

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the final claims for compensation from the six men wrongly convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings; when it was passed to Sir David Calcutt; and what action has been taken.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: All six men are eligible for compensation but only five have submitted the information which enables the assessor to determine what amount should be paid. This information was received in the Home Office between October 1992 and December 1993, and after clarification and elaboration of a number of points was passed to the assessor in May and August 1994. Further information was submitted on behalf of the applicants in February 1995. Substantial interim payments have been made in all six cases and the final assessments will be completed as soon as possible.

Leon Patterson

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with Greater Manchester police concerning the death in their custody of Leon Patterson on 27 November 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* As stated in the reply given to the hon. Member on 10 May 1993, this is a matter for the chief constable of the Greater Manchester police.

Drug Trafficking (Seized Assets)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the value of assets seized under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 by Merseyside police; if he will consider making such amounts available for drugs education and training by Merseyside police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Returns from magistrates courts for the Merseyside area show that between April 1989 and March 1994, the following sums were remitted to the Secretary of State under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986:

Year	*£*
1989–90	4,561.20
1990–91	71,473.39
1991–92	175,101.43
1992–93	192,410.21
1993–94	106,646.99
Total	550,193.22

I have no plans to change existing arrangements under which confiscated money is treated in the same way as fine revenue and paid directly into the consolidated fund from which Government expenditure generally—including substantial support for drug-related work—is financed. Approximately £500 million is spent each year on supporting our drugs strategy, including local drug education programmes. Investigations into drug trafficking and the prosecution and conviction of offenders and the confiscation of drugs proceeds involve the police, the courts, the Crown Prosecution Service and HM Customs and Excise, all of whom devote considerable resources to this area.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environmentally Sensitive Area Agreements

Sir David Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many environmentally sensitive area agreements have been concluded in England involving payments in the *(a)* £0–£5,000, *(b)* £5,000–£10,000, *(c)* £10,001–£15,000, *(d)* £15,001–£20,000, *(e)* £25,000–£50,000, *(f)* £50,001–£75,000, *(g)* £75,001–£100,000, *(h)* £100,000–£150,000, *(i)* £150,000–£200,000 and *(j)* over £200,000 bands.

Mr. Jack: The number of English ESA agreements in each band is as follows:

£	*Number*
0–5,000	5,071
5,001–10,000	722
10,001–15,000	201
15,001–20,000	69
20,001–25,000	46
25,001–50,000	80
50,001–75,000	10
75,001–1000,000	5
100,001–150,000	0
150,001–200,000	0
Over 200,000	0

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Jack: The number of staff who have applied for a career break is 39—two men and 37 women. No one has had their employment terminated in the last five years. The career break scheme was introduced in MAFF and some of its agencies on 8 September 1994.

Decommissioning Scheme

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to extend the fishing boat decommissioning scheme to compensate fishing crews, fish merchants and ancillary workers as well as boat owners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I have no such plans. The decommissioning scheme is a means of enabling us to meet the targets for the reduction in fleet capacity which we have accepted as part of the common fisheries policy. It is a voluntary measure which operates through a tendering system in order to secure the best value for money. It is up to vessel owners to make suitable provision to meet any contractual obligations to their crews or third parties. By contributing to a better balance between fishing capacity and available fish stocks decommissioning will help to provide a more viable long-term future for the remaining United Kingdom fleet and related industries.

Food from Britain

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of funding received by Food From Britain in each year since 1985.

Mr. Jack: The information is as follows:

Level of Funding of Food from Britain (£ Million)

Year	*Government*	*Industry*	*Total*
1985–86	5.9	1.0	6.9
1986–87	5.0	0.7	5.6
1987–88	4.1	2.1	6.2
1988–89	4.2	2.8	6.9
1989–90	4.5	3.1	7.6
1990–91	4.5	3.0	7.5
1991–92	4.5	3.3	7.8
1992–93	4.8	3.8	8.6
1993–94	5.0	4.0	9.0
1994–95	[1]5.3	[1]4.4	[1]9.6

[1] estimated

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the percentage of disabled

people directly employed by his; if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: On 1 July 1994, nearly 1.5 per cent. of the staff directly employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including its agencies were registered as disabled. In 1993, a voluntary survey of all staff, which achieved a 60 per cent. response, showed that between three and four times that number considered that they had a disability.

Discarded Fish

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to amend fisheries regulations to reduce the quantity of discarded fish in the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Fish discards can be a particular problem in waters such as the North sea where different species shoal together. Changes to the regulations affecting discards would have to be made under the common fisheries policy. The Council of Fisheries Ministers is concerned to reduce discards and has asked the Commission to make proposals. One of the approaches under consideration is to improve the selectivity of fishing gear and research is being undertaken to this end. In the light of this, and other developments, it will be for the Commission to bring forward proposals for amendment to EU regulations.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will support changing the status of animals from goods and products to sentient creatures at the inter-governmental conference in 1996; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* The Government secured a declaration, attached to the Maastricht treaty, concerning the need to take full account of animal welfare in agricultural and other policies.

The Government are considering a number of issues and options in preparation for the 1996 inter-governmental conference.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer on 17 February, *Official Report*, column *872–74*, (1) if he will state the net gain for a person aged 18 to 25 years, who is on income support, and has worked at £3.20 per hour for *(a)* eight hours and *(b)* 16 hours, showing calculations in each case, including the pence per hour net gain from working the extra eight hours;

(2) if he will state the net gain for a married couple on income support, if the man has worked at £3.20 per hour for *(a)* eight hours and *(b)* 16 hours, showing calculations in each case, including the pence per hour net gain from working the extra eight hours.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables. Information for a single person is for those in the age group 18 to 24 years. Information for those aged 25 and over was given in the reply to the hon. Member on Friday 17 February, *Official Report*, columns *872–74*.

Many single people in the age group shown will not be liable for rent and council tax. In these cases the net gain from working 16 hours will be £15.05, being the difference between net pay of £51.20 and income support of £36.15. This represents a gain of £1.26 per hour for the additional eight hours work.

To address poor incentives to increase hours of work we are introducing two new measures:

from October 1996 the back-to-work bonus will provide an additional gain of half the value of earnings above the appropriate disregard, £5 for singles, £10 for couples, payable on moving into work of 16 hours or more. For a single person unemployed for a year, the gain from taking work of 16 hours would therefore also be a lump sum of around £400.

From October 1996, a new in-work benefit aimed at couples and single people without children will be tested to examine its effects on increasing the gain from work for these groups in the same way as family credit does for families with children.

Gain from work at £3.20 per hour

Hours Worked	*Pay*	*Income Support*	*Rent*	*Housing Benefit*	*Council Tax*	*Council Tax Benefit*	*Total Net Income*	*Net Income after payment of rent and council tax when in work*	*Net Income after payment of rent and council tax when not in work*	*Net gain from work*	*Pence per hour gain from working 8 hours*[1]
Single person aged 18-24											
8	25.60	15.55	30.91	30.91	6.60	6.60	78.66	41.15	36.15	5.00	63
16	51.20	—	30.91	24.38	6.60	4.59	80.17	42.66	36.15	6.51	19
Married Couple (£5 earnings disregard in income support)											
8	25.60	51.10	30.91	30.91	8.60	8.60	116.21	76.70	71.70	5.00	63
16	51.20	—	30.91	30.91	8.60	8.60	90.71	51.20	71.70	—	—

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole penny.
2. Both members of the couple are assumed to be aged under 60. One or both members are assumed to be aged 18 or over.
3. Both the couple and the single person are assumed to live in local authority accommodation and be liable for average council tax and local authority rent.
4. All the examples shown assume take-up full entitlement to Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.
5. Tax and National Insurance contributions are not payable at the earnings levels shown.

Child Support

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the methods used to calculate the costs of *(a)* a £10 and *(b)* £15 disregard of maintenance for parents in receipt of income support.

Mr. Burt: In estimating the costs of a maintenance disregard, estimates and assumptions are made in the following areas:

the number of lone parents and step families on income support in any particular year;

the proportion of parents with care whose absent parent has a maintenance assessment greater than zero;

the proportion of this scheduled maintenance actually being paid or received;

the average amount of maintenance disregarded, taking account of the fact that for parents with care receiving less than £10 to £15 maintenance per week, the disregard will equal the amount of maintenance received.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will meet *(a)* the National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs and *(b)* the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund to discuss medical assessment in respect of incapacity benefit.

Mr. Hague: The development of the medical assessment for incapacity benefit included an open consultation process, to which the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund contributed. If either of these organisations has further comments on the medical assessment, I would be happy to received them.

World Summit for Social Development

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he proposes to publish representations made

on behalf of the British Government at the world summit for social development about measures concerned with social development in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Roger Evans: There are no plans to do so. The speeches of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will be published and copies will be placed in the Library.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 31 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *623–24*.

Statutory Maternity Pay

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost to the Exchequer of 18 weeks maternity leave per person.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available in the form requested. Information available relates to statutory maternity pay. The average cost to the Exchequer of 18 weeks' SMP per beneficiary is estimated at £1,710 for 1995–96.

Notes:

1. The estimated average cost has been rounded to the nearest £10 but is not accurate to that degree.
2. The figure represents SMP reimbursement to employers and is not the average amount of SMP paid to women.
3. Not all women receive 18 weeks of SMP and not all beneficiaries are on maternity leave as such—some resign from their employment on commencement of the maternity pay period.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department independent caseload and expenditure forecasts.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women took paid maternity leave in each of the last three years; and what was the overall cost.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information relates to women receiving statutory maternity pay and is in the table.

Statutory Maternity Pay 1991–92 to 1993–94

	1991–92 £ million	*1992–93 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*
Total estimated expenditure	345	398	420
Estimated number of beneficiaries	245,000	245,000	260,000

Notes:

1. Expenditure figures appear in the 1994 Social Security Departmental Report and are at cash prices.
2. Figures for number of beneficiaries have been estimated using figures provided by the Government Actuary's Department and assume that all women receive SMP for a full 18 weeks.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how benefit savings are calculated in instances of fraud uncovered *(a)* generally by his officers and *(b)* by the Child Support Agency;

(2) by what multiple of the value of the order is used to calculate the benefit savings when order books are withdrawn on the grounds that the claimant has committed fraud.

Mr. Arbuthnot: A weekly benefit saving is recorded by the Benefits Agency when as a result of action by a fraud investigator benefit is reduced or withdrawn. The value of the saving is increased in value by the use of a multiplier which is an estimate of the average time for which a fraud would have continued, had the fraud not been discovered. It is therefore a measure of the average time for which benefit payments are saved by investigation work which leads to the termination or correcting of fraudulent claims. The multiplier used for benefit frauds is 32.

Frauds uncovered by the Child Support Agency are referred to the Benefits Agency for investigation. Savings in these cases are calculated in the same way as above.

If the fraud is one which concerns the manipulation or fraudulent encashment of a stolen or lost order book, the saving will be the total value of the orders remaining in the order book when the book is recovered.

Resettlement Units

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many DSS resettlement units have closed each year since 1990.

Mr. Roger Evans: Since 1990 the Department has either closed and replaced or disengaged from the direct administration of 16 resettlement units as follows:

Year and unit	*Status*
1991	
Fazakerley—Liverpool	Closed
Brighton	Closed
Bridge House	Closed
1992	
Alvaston—Derby	Closed
Walkden—Manchester	Closed
Winterbourne—Bristol	Closed
Plawsworth—Newcastle	Closed
1993	
Stormy Down—South Wales	Closed
Camden—London	Disengaged
Southampton	Disengaged
Newbury	Disengaged
1994	
Spur House—Lewisham	Disengaged
Pound Lodge—Brent	Disengaged
Leicester	Disengaged
Lye—West Midlands	Disengaged
West End House—London	Disengaged

HEALTH

Medical Negligence Claims

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of medical negligence were settled, and what was the total cost of damages awarded together with legal costs, in each year since 1990–91, by region.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. member to the figures that my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough

(Dr. Mawhinney) gave him on 14 March, columns *535–36* and on 10 May 1994, columns *84–85*, which are reproduced in the first table. As was made clear at the time, these figures were based on information which was not comprehensive and in particular do not include data from National Health Service trusts, which will form an increasingly large proportion of the total. We have therefore developed an alternative method of estimating the total costs of clinical negligence to the NHS, based on quarterly financial monitoring. In the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 30 January 1995, column *523*, costs on this new basis were estimated at £80 million in 1991–92, £100 million in 1992–93 and £125 million in 1993–94. Regional breakdowns—comparable to these new estimates—are now available for 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95, provisional, and are shown in the second table. Estimates of number of settlements are not available.

Table 1: Number and Costs to the NHS of Clinical Negligence Settlements by Region

	Old estimates					
	1990–91		*1991–92*		*1992–93*	
Region	*Cases*	*Cost £000*	*Cases*	*Cost £000*	*Cases*	*Cost £000*
Northern	109	1,613	207	3,310	344	3,395
Yorkshire	152	4,604	111	3,302	49	1,720
Trent	73	2,611	119	2,069	105	2,953
East Anglian	38	1,359	88	1,737	37	3,295
North West Thames	89	8,551	221	6,954	183	6,209
North East Thames	136	8,464	108	5,888	76	1,624
South East Thames	n/k	6,118	106	7,113	117	5,714
South West Thames	104	3,233	90	4,663	64	2,543
Wessex	52	1,525	51	919	72	681
Oxford	231	2,257	131	3,339	113	917
South Western	56	2,104	83	2,872	56	3,517
West Midlands	154	3,157	145	2,573	165	3,661
Mersey	218	1,421	108	1,002	192	3,622
North Western	183	2,580	145	4,730	160	4,457
SHAs	23	3,639	38	877	5	752

Estimates based on annual health authority returns.

Table 2: Costs to the NHS of clinical negligence settlements by region (New estimates)

£ million

Authority RHA	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95 (provisional)*
Northern	5.4	7.6	—
Yorkshire	5.9	5.7	—
Trent	5.4	6.0	—
East Anglia	4.0	4.3	—
North West Thames	10.8	7.8	—
North East Thames	10.5	10.9	—
South East Thames	4.1	19.7	—
South West Thames	3.2	6.1	—
Wessex	0.1	0.3	—
Oxford	4.2	4.2	—
South Western	6.3	6.5	—
West Midlands	4.5	7.1	—
Mersey	6.4	3.7	—
North Western	9.4	10.0	—
Northern and Yorkshire	—	12.9	21.0
Trent	—	6.0	6.7
Anglia and Oxford	—	9.0	19.2
North Thames	—	18.1	26.3
South Thames	—	25.9	16.0
South and West	—	6.8	10.0
West Midlands	—	7.1	10.2
North West	—	14.1	15.7

Note:
Estimates based on quarterly financial returns. Figures for special health authorities are included in the relevant Thames Region.

Casualty Admissions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the percentage change in casualty admissions in *(a)* England and *(b)* London; and what increase in beds or other resources have been made available to accident and emergency departments in (i) England and (ii) London within the last year.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available in the form requested. There was an overall increase of 0.3 per cent. in the number of patients admitted to hospital under an accident and emergency consultant in England in 1993–94, while in the Thames regional health authorities admissions in the accident and emergency specialty fell by 3.2 per cent.

Information on accident and emergency beds is not available centrally. The number of hospital consultants in the specialty of accident and emergency medicine increased by 7.6 per cent. in England and by 9 per cent. in the Thames regions between 1992 and 1993, the latest figures available. In the same period, other hospital medical staff in the accident and emergency specialty increased by 5 per cent. in England by 4.4 per cent. in the Thames regions.

NHS Complaints

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to act upon the final report of the NHS Complaints Review Committee, submitted in May 1994 entitled, "Being Heard".

Mr. Malone: We welcomed the publication of "Being Heard", the report of the National Health Service Complaints Review Committee, and support its central recommendation for a simpler, speedier NHS complaints system. Over 600 responses were received to the consultation on the report, raising some complex issues. We are carefully considering our response to the report in

the light of this and will make an announcement as soon as our present considerations are complete.

Family Health Centres

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family health centres per 1,000 population there are in *(a)* inner London, *(b)* outer London, *(c)* Greater London, *(d)* Birmingham, *(e)* Manchester, *(f)* Liverpool, *(g)* Leeds, *(h)* Newcastle, *(i)* Bristol and *(j)* England.

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table.

Location	*Health centres per 1,000 population*
Inner London	0.022
Greater London (inclusive of Inner London figures)	0.017
Newcastle	0.028
Leeds	0.030
Birmingham	0.023
Liverpool	0.035
Manchester	0.026
Bristol	0.040
England	0.021

Notes:

1. Inner London is taken to be the areas covered by the following family health services authorities: Camden and Islington; City and East London; Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster and Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham.

2. Greater London figures include inner and outer London.

3. For the purposes of this answer, "family health centres" has been defined as those properties owned by the Secretary of State or an NHS trust and occupied by family practitioners and other health care providers. Some trusts may own other properties from which a variety of community health clinics are provided but not also occupied by GPs. Numbers of this type of health centre are not, however, held centrally.

Community Care

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent by her Department on community care for the mentally ill, broken down by local authority for the three most recent years for which figures are available; and what is the proportion of the resources allocated to community care spent on mental health patients.

Mr. Bowis: Figures of expenditure by local authorities in England in 1990–91 to 1992–93 on services for people with mental health problems, and the corresponding percentages of expenditure on all services for adults, are shown in the table.

Figures for individual authorities, excluding apportioned overheads, for the years 1991–92 and 1992–93 will be placed in the Library. Comparable 1990–91 data for individual local authorities are not available centrally.

These figures show direct services for people with mental illness, and do not take account of other expenditure which it would not be possible to calculate separately.

Gross expenditure by local authorities on services for people with mental health problems, England[1]

Financial year	*Gross expenditure on mental health*[2] *(£ million)*	*As a percentage of expenditure on services for adults*
1990–91	116	3.6
1991–92	180	5.0
1992–93	220	5.8

Notes:

[1] These figures include apportioned overheads (to cover, for example, administration and training costs).

[2] Includes fieldwork for mentally ill. Prior to 1991–92, expenditure on fieldwork was estimated by the Department of Health whereas after then it reflects actual expenditure as reported by local authorities.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department has undertaken research into the user's view of the transition from psychiatric long-stay hospitals to community care.

Mr. Bowis: A series of studies was carried out by the team for the assessment of psychiatric services which was set up in 1985 to monitor the closure of Friern and Claybury hospitals in the then North East Thames region, which established that the great majority of users preferred the new community-based services.

Death Certificates

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money is paid each year to doctors in the health service in respect of the fees paid for signing the necessary papers to verify that someone died of natural causes, before the funeral director can release a body for cremation.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in her Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not hold records of past applications for career breaks. There are currently 130 people, 12 male and 118 female, on career breaks in the Department and its agencies, 111 of whom have been on a career break of between one and five years. No staff have had their employment terminated during the five year breaks allowed by the Department; four staff have had their appointments terminated after the five years have elapsed as they failed to resign or return to work.

Prescriptions, Sheffield

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued in the Sheffield health authority area for each of the last five years; and how many were exempt from payment.

Mr. Malone: The information available is shown in the table. Comparable information for years before 1991 is not available.

Prescription items dispensed in Sheffield Family Health Services Authority: 1991–93

Prescription items dispensed (thousands)[1]	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Total[2]	5,146	5,393	5,644
With no charge[3]	4,161	4,412	4,656

[1] The figures relate to prescription items dispensed in Sheffield FHSA, regardless of where they were written, and may include prescriptions written by hospital doctors, dentists and armed services doctors and dentists.

[2] The total includes all prescription items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.

[3] The analysis of exempt prescription items is based on a one in 20 sample of all prescriptions submitted to the Prescription Pricing Authority by community pharmacists and appliance contractors. In this table "With no charge" prescriptions include those dispensed under the NHS low income scheme and no charge contraceptives.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of deaths from breast cancer in respect of women aged 65 years or over in each year since 1984.

Mr. Sackville: The information is published in "Mortality Statistics", cause, series DH2, Nos. 11–19, copies of which are available in the Library.

Electrical Nerve Stimulators

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances and subject to what conditions transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation machines are available on the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: National health service consultants may prescribe pain relief equipment such as transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulators—TENS machines—as part of NHS treatment, and when they do no charge is made. Health authorities may provide such equipment either on a permanent basis or on loan. However, supply depends on decisions being made on the basis of clinical priorities and local needs.

In some cases, where pain relief equipment is not considered clinically essential, a consultant may nevertheless advise a patient that he could use it if he wished. In such cases, health authorities would not be responsible for either providing or maintaining the equipment.

Accident and Emergency Service, South London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussion she has had in the last year with officials of the south Thames health authorities in respect of existing accident and emergency services in hospitals covering this area of London.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had regular meetings with the chairman and chief executive of South Thames regional health authority at which service developments, including accident and emergency services, have been discussed.

Elderly Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what percentage of the NHS expenditure is spent on elderly care; and if she will make a statement about the procedure for applying to receive this care.

Mr. Bowis: We estimate that around 40 per cent. of total hospital and community health service expenditure is on people aged 65 and over, who comprise about 16 per cent. of the population. Every citizen has the right to receive health care free at the point of delivery on the basis of clinical need and judgment.

Hospital Beds, North-east Wiltshire

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what estimate she has made of the demand for, and supply of, hospital beds in the north-east of Wiltshire in the next five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Alastair Service, chairman of the Wiltshire and Bath health authority, which is responsible for purchasing health services to meet the needs of the local population.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by her Department; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 31 January, column *628*, and the reply I gave the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 5 December 1994, columns *85–87*.

Hospital Complaints Procedures

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedure exists to make judgment on a complaint of alleged premature discharge of a patient from a NHS hospital or trust due to financial considerations and contrary to medical considerations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Hospital complaints procedures are described in "Health Circular HC(88)37", copies of which are available in the Library. This was supplemented by guidance on "NHS responsibilities for continuing health care needs", which was issued on 23 February 1995 and which is also in the Library.

Primary Care Projects, London

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the new primary care projects in London since 1993.

Mr. Malone: Since 1993, 965 primary care projects are in planning or underway in the London initiative zone. A list of the individual LIZ projects will be placed in the Library. Details of London primary care projects outside the LIZ may be obtained from the local health authorities and community trusts.

Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute psychiatric beds per 1,000 of the

population there are in *(a)* the West Midlands region, *(b)* the North West region, *(c)* the North Thames region, *(d)* the South Thames region and *(e)* in England and Wales.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available in the form requested. The numbers of beds per thousands of population, in wards for patients suffering from mental illness, are shown in the table:

1993–94

	Average daily available beds[1]	*Population*[2]	*Beds per thousand population*
West Midlands	3,854	5,289,772	0.73
North West	6,466	6,616,509	0.98
North Thames	7,300	6,793,292	1.07
South Thames	5,742	6,716,917	0.85
England	43,162	48,532,705	0.89

Source:
KH03 returns.

Notes:
[1] Beds include both short and long stay, for children, elderly and adults. Beds are not for the exclusive use of the population of the region in which they are to be found.
[2] Population as at mid-1993.

Figures for Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of Wales.

Rural Medical Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what special funding arrangements are provided for casualty work undertaken in rural general practices.

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policies are implemented to address the difficulties of providing medical care in rural areas.

Mr. Malone: A central aim of Government health care policy has been to base the purchasing of services on a proper assessment of local need. This helps to target provision to reflect particular circumstances, such as those in rural areas. In addition, there are a number of local initiatives around the country which aim to improve medical care in rural areas. There are also some specific allowances to help rural general practitioners.

Health care issues in rural affairs will also be addressed in the Rural White Paper announced by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 12 October 1994. Preparatory work for this has involved widespread consultation, including with health care and professional organisations.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on initiatives to promote the use of communication and information technology in rural medical services.

Mr. Sackville: There is an information management and technology strategy which covers the whole of the national health service, including the use of communication and information technology in rural medical services.

Primary Care

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on primary care emergency centres.

Mr. Malone: General practitioners decide which model of out-of-hours service delivery best suits local needs. In some places, this will include the use of primary care centres to offer high quality services to patients.

NHS Building Projects

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the building projects in the NHS from 1990–91 which have not become operational; and what were their total costs.

Mr. Sackville: I am not aware of any major national health service building projects in England that have failed to become operational following commissioning of new facilities.

Local Pay

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts have a local pay bargaining mechanism in operation.

Mr. Malone: In June 1994, the chief executive of the national health service executive asked all NHS trusts in England to establish local pay machinery by February 1995, which would allow a significant proportion of pay in 1995–96 to be based on local needs and achievements. Information is not available centrally about the local arrangements.

Adoptions

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many adoptions took place last year of children aged *(a)* under three years, *(b)* between three and five years, *(c)* between five and 10 years and *(d)* over 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available precisely in the form requested. The last year for which completed figures are available is 1993, in which there were 6,859 adoptions in England and Wales. Of these, 465 children were aged under one, 1,894 between one and four, 2,543 between five and nine, 1,570 between 10 and 14 and 387 between 15 and 17 years of age. Previous years' data were published in "Marriage and Divorce Statistics: England and Wales 1993", copies of which are available in the Library.

Newborn Handicapped Babies

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the recent claims by Dr. Nicholson that he had killed newborn handicapped babies;

(2) on how many occasions in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available newborn handicapped babies have been killed by doctors or other medical personnel;

(3) if she will make it her policy to write to all medical practitioners reminding them that the killing of newborn handicapped babies is illegal; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The deliberate killing of any human being is an illegal act. It is for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether any action should be taken over Dr. Nicholson's claims. Current Home Office criminal statistics do not identify any cases involving the killing of newborn handicapped babies by doctors or others. The Department does not keep separate information.

All doctors are well aware that the deliberate killing of patients is illegal. It is also contrary to their ethical obligations.

International Peto Institute

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been *(a)* paid and *(b)* pledged by her Department towards the construction of the International Peto Institute in Budapest.

Mr. Bowis: The Government have paid an initial sum of £1.75 million towards the cost of building a new International Peto Institute in Budapest. The Government undertook to contribute £5 million to this project. Our agreement with the Hungarian Government provides that subsequent payments will be dependent upon progress with construction.

NHS Charges

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the annual cost of abolishing NHS charges presently made for eye and dental checks.

Mr. Malone: There is no charge for the provision of national health service sight tests. People who are entitled to NHS tests do not pay anything towards their cost. The fees payable to optometrists and ophthalmic medical practitioners for carrying out these tests are paid by family health services authorities. People not entitled to an NHS sight test pay for a private sight test.

For dental examinations, assuming that the removal of the charge led to no increase in the number of dental examinations, the annual cost, at 1993–94 prices, would be approximately £70 million.

Mental Illness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the operational definition of serious mental illness used by her Department.

Mr. Bowis: We have not set a rigid central definition of severe mental illness.

We issued for consultation in October 1994 a "Draft Guide to Arrangements for Inter-agency Working for the Care and Protection of Severely Mentally Ill People". The draft guide contains a framework definition of severe mental illness on which local services can base their own more detailed operational definitions. Copies of the guide are available in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to introduce national standards for the purposes of the assessment and placement of potential patients following sentence by a court; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: None. The Mental Health Act 1983 defines the circumstances in which a person suffering from a mental disorder can be detained in hospital. Health Circular EL(90)168 and Home Office circular 66/90, both available in the Library, draw to the attention of health service and criminal justice agencies the importance of appropriate disposals of offenders who have a mental disorder.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to develop the public's awareness of mental illness; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: We launched a public information strategy on mental illness in March 1993. The strategy, which will cost in excess of £1 million over three years, aims to raise public awareness of mental illness, its causes and its treatment. In addition, the Health Education Authority is starting a programme of work in this sector.

Prescriptions

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the annual cost to the Exchequer resulting from a 1 per cent. real terms reduction in the price of NHS prescriptions.

Mr. Malone: About £2.2 million, based on the number of prescription items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors in England in 1993–94 for which a charge was paid.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community psychiatric nurses are placed at *(a)* police stations and *(b)* courts, by region; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Court Diversions Schemes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on court diversions schemes for the mentally disordered.

Mr. Bowis: We encourage the development of court assessment schemes to ensure that defendants who have a mental disorder receive care and treatment from health and social care services where necessary. The specific arrangements to be made locally are a matter for the agencies concerned. There are now over 100 schemes nationally compared with only a handful in 1991. About 50 schemes receive financial support from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give a breakdown by specialty of the numbers of patients and the period for which they were waiting for surgery in each district health authority in England and Wales at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Malone: The available information on waiting lists and times by specialty at each national health service trust and district health authority in England is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department *(a)* hold open meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 10 January 1995, c. 128]:* I regret that my previous answer did not give all the required information. This is as follows:

(a) *Hold open meetings:*
None
(b) *conduct public consultation exercises:*
(i) *under a statutory requirement:*
None
(ii) *voluntarily:*
British Pharmacopoeia Commission;
Nutrition Task Force;
(c) *conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests:*
(i) *under a statutory requirement:*
None
(ii) *voluntarily:*
British Pharmacopoeia Commission;
Nutrition Task Force;
(d) *publish a register of members' interests:*
(i) *under a statutory requirement:*
None
(ii) *voluntarily:*
Advisory Board on the Registration of Homeopathic Products;
Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food;
Committee on Dental and Surgical Materials;
Committee on Safety of Medicines;
Committee on the Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment;
Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy;
Committee on the Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment;
Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food;
Consumer Products and the Environment;
Medicines Commission;
(e) *publish agendas for meetings:*
None
(f) *publish the minutes of meetings:*
(i) *under a statutory requirement:*
None
(ii) *voluntarily:*
Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy.

TRANSPORT

Rail Communications

14. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new proposals he has to improve rail communications.

Mr. Watts: The preparations for the franchising of passenger train services, the flotation of Railtrack and the sales of domestic rail freight and BR's other businesses will contribute to improved rail communications.

Crossrail

15. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the crossrail project.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have asked the crossrail promoters to study various aspects of the project further with my Department, in parallel with preparing their application for powers to build crossrail under the Transport and Works Act.

Passenger Behaviour

16. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for regulations to improve the standard of behaviour of passengers on public transport.

Mr. Norris: Regulations or bye-laws are already in place governing passenger behaviour on public transport and there are no plans to amend them.

Newly Qualified Drivers

17. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to reduce the incidence of road accidents amongst newly qualified drivers.

Mr. Norris: We are implementing a package of measures on the education, training and testing of new drivers to improve their safety.

Stations

18. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ask the chairman of British Rail to review the arrangements for the maintenance of stations and their immediate surroundings.

Mr. Watts: None.

Kent Coastal Lines

19. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the provision of new rolling stock for the Kent coastal lines.

Mr. Watts: BR has invited and received expressions of interest from ABB and GEC-Alsthom in being invited to tender for a possible new order for Kent coastal lines, in a form consistent with the terms of the private finance initiative.

Rail Privatisation

20. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he is making concerning the contracts of employment of senior executives after rail privatisation.

Mr. Watts: None.

29. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to meet the Franchising Director to discuss the rail services being put out to franchise.

Mr. Watts: I next expect to meet the Franchising Director on 9 March.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those parts of the railway system which will have been privatised or put out to contract by April 1996.

Mr. Watts: Sales since 1981 are:

BR Hovercraft Ltd: 24 October 1981
BT Hotels (29 hotels sold in groups to various purchasers): 1982–83–84
Superbreak Mini Holidays: 14 February 1983
Slateford Laundry, Edinburgh: 19 September 1983
Sealink (UK) Ltd: 27 July 1984
BT Advertising Ltd: 28 August 1987
Doncaster Wagon Works: 16 October 1987
Horwich Foundry: 15 August 1988
Travellers Fare: 19 December 1988
BR Engineering Ltd: 18 April 1989
Golden Rail: 9 May 1989
Transmark: 7 April 1993
Meldon Quarry: 4 March 1994

Intended Sales to April 1996:

Special Trains Unit
BR Maintenance Ltd (7 Depots)
Domestic Freight Businesses
- Three Trainload Freight Companies
- Freightliner
- Red Star
- Rail Express Systems

Three Rolling Stock Leasing Companies
BR Infrastructure Services
- 7 Design Offices
- 6 Track Renewal Units
- 7 Infrastructure Maintenance Units

BR Telecommunications
Various Businesses in BR Central Services.

Others

Franchising of 51 per cent. of Railway Passenger Services.
Certain Legal and Architectural Services have been Contracted Out.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask Secretary of State for Transport what further meetings he has had with British Rail to discuss its concerns about privatisation.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have regular meetings with the British Railways board to discuss a variety of issues including railway privatisation.

27. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further representations he has received about the progress of rail privatisation.

Mr. Watts: I receive representations about all aspects of rail privatisation regularly.

Waterways

23. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to increase the use of the waterways for freight transportation.

Dr. Mawhinney: Users and providers of freight services are encouraged to consider the environmental and other benefits of waterborne transport. Grants are available under section 140 of the Railways Act 1993 for inland waterway developments which demonstrate an environmental benefit in the form of lorry miles saved.

Buses

24. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to discuss with bus operators the European Union proposal that the percentage of passengers standing on buses should be increased.

Dr. Mawhinney: My Department is in regular contact with both the manufacturing and operating sides of the bus industry and is very much aware of their concerns about the proposed EC Bus and Coach Directive.

My hon. Friend, the Minister for Local Transport and Road Safety will shortly be meeting representatives from both sides of the industry specifically to discuss the full implications of the proposal.

Associated British Ports

25. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who will be chairing the inquiry into Associated British Ports' application for navigation powers over the western Solent.

Mr. Norris: The inquiry on this application for a harbour order is expected to take place in the autumn. An inspector will be appointed by the Planning Inspectorate Agency once the inquiry date has been established.

Ministerial Travel

26. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to travel on the railway line from Carlisle to London.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has no present plans which involve travel on the Carlisle to London railway line.

Road Pricing

28. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning *(a)* motorway tolls and *(b)* urban road pricing in the last six months.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on both subjects.

MV Derbyshire (Wreckage)

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to complete his consideration of the chief inspector of marine accident's assessment of the material provided by the International Transport Workers' Federation following their location of the wreckage of the Derbyshire and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The formal investigation in 1987 into the loss of the Derbyshire decided that

"... the DERBYSHIRE was probably overwhelmed by the forces of nature in typhoon Orchid."

and added that

"the evidence available does not support any firmer conclusion".

Subsequently, in June 1994, the wreckage of the Derbyshire was found during an ITF-sponsored search. The chief inspector of marine accidents has examined the evidence submitted to him by ITF and has advised me that the evidence still does not allow the cause of the Derbyshire's loss to be determined.

I have decided, therefore, that an assessment should be made of what further work might be undertaken to seek to determine the actual cause of the loss of the Derbyshire, together with assessments of the costs involved, the likelihood of establishing the cause, and the likely benefits to ship safety. I have asked the right hon. Lord Donaldson of Lymington to undertake these assessments with the following terms of reference:

To assess—

what further work would be needed in order to learn more of and, if possible, make a judgment about the cause of the loss of the Derbyshire

in respect of each option for further work the assessed probability that the cause could be determined with reasonable confidence

for each option the costs likely to be incurred

what benefit to ship safety would be secured if the cause of the loss of the Derbyshire were established, or if better understanding of the cause of the loss was obtained, and whether in either case this would justify the likely costs involved.

A technical assessor will be appointed to assist Lord Donaldson. Lord Donaldson's report to me will be published.

British Rail Chairman

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if a new chairman of British Rail has been appointed to succeed Sir Bob Reid when he leaves the post at the end of March.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am very pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. John Welsby, CBE, to take over the chairmanship of British Rail at 1 April 1995. John Welsby has been British Rail's chief executive since 1990, and will also continue in this post.

His appointment will be for a fixed period to 25 May 1998, at a salary of £180,000 a year. He will be eligible for a performance-related bonus of up to 40 per cent. of salary, in common with other executive board members and in accordance with Treasury guidelines.

I am delighted that John Welsby has agreed to become the next chairman. His experience and long-standing commitment to improving our railways will be a great asset in taking forward the privatisation process. I know he is keen to see through these changes that are already underway, in order to develop and improve the railways to give rail user the services that we all want see.

I should also like to pay tribute to Sir Bob Reid's achievement as chairman over the past five years. He has led BR through a period of substantial changes, which have improved both quality and efficiency in British Rail. I am grateful for all he has done.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what actions have been taken concerning departmental action on bomb warnings since the meeting of 14 June 1989 between assistant secretary C. T. Harris and Mr. and Mrs. Martin Cadman, Lockerbie relatives, and Mr. Derek Dempster, a member of the Air Transport Users' Committee.

Mr. Norris: A working group was established in 1990 with the specific aim of reviewing and developing the procedures issued by the Department to the industry for the handling of bomb warnings. As a result revised procedures were introduced into the national aviation security programme in July 1991. In addition, a supporting training package was developed for bomb warning assessors.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions over any convenient period in the last 10 years, a jumbo jet 747 has been parked at the centre stand serviced by the Euro-lounge, at the Euro terminal, terminal 2, Heathrow airport.

Mr. Norris: My Department does not maintain such records. However, we have been told by a representative of Heathrow Airport Ltd. that this particular stand area did not, until recently, have the capacity to accommodate a Boeing 747 aircraft.

Maid of the Seas Aircraft

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the records relating to all the movements for the Pan Am Clipper, Maid of the Seas, from the time it landed at London Heathrow on 21 December 1988 until departure for New York later that evening.

Mr. Norris: No. The official records relating to the movements of this aircraft were collated by the Metropolitan police as part of their investigation of the handling of the flight at Heathrow. We understand that such records may be required at a criminal trial.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up an inquiry to ascertain for what reasons on 21 December 1988 the Pan Am Clipper, Maid of the Seas was parked at the centre stand in an insolated position at Euro terminal, terminal 2, Heathrow before setting off on flight 103, destination New York.

Mr. Norris: My Department does not hold full details of the information sought. However, available information shows that the Pan Am Boeing 747 Maid of the Seas did not park at terminal 2. It arrived at Heathrow airport from San Francisco at 12.07 hours on 21 December 1988, and disembarked its passengers at stand K14, terminal 3. The aircraft remained at that stand until 18.04 hours when it departed bound for New York.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the letter of 14 February from Mr. J. D. Rimmington CB, director general of the Health and Safety Executive, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what information he has been given by Railtrack about *(a)* the timetable for painting the lattice tie members on the Forth rail bridge, *(b)* the timetable for painting the compression members on the Forth rail bridge and *(c)* the qualifications of operating in a marine environment of those who made the judgments for Railtrack that there are no significant structural implications relating to rust or the movement to a longer term repainting cycle.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack is in the second year of an eight-year programme for painting the lattice tie members of the Forth bridge. The strategy for painting the inclined tubular compression members is under review but should be resolved shortly. Railtrack has many structures subject to a marine environment. Judgments about structural integrity and steel work protection are taken on the advice of chartered structural civil and mechanical engineers employed by the railway. An assessment of the condition of the bridge, including advice on the principles to be adopted for future painting, has been carried out for Railtrack by consultants W. A. Fairhurst and Partners.

Disabled Employees

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Responses to voluntary questionnaires show that at least 2.4 per cent.—315—of Department of Transport staff have a disability.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to whom and by what method a British traveller can obtain a response to a complaint about security on the Paris departure side of the channel tunnel rail route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: All complaints from British-based travellers should be addressed to the customer relations department of European Passenger Services, the United Kingdom operator of the Eurostar service.

Rail Contracts

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many separate contracts will need to be completed in 1995–96 to enable the managed rail services to operate.

Mr. Watts: Railway industry organisations are currently translating into contractual form their existing operational and commercial relationships. No estimate is held centrally of the total number of contracts which will be entered into in 1995–96.

Midland Metro

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of how much more local funding is necessary before the Government release the funding they have promised for the midland metro line; how many jobs will be created by the new line; what other such rail lines are planned for the west midlands; and what percentage of funding for the midland metro line will come from the local area, and how much will come from the Government.

Mr. Norris: Where the benefits of a light rail scheme are primarily local in character, it is reasonable that the local community should make a significant contribution to the cost. There is no fixed percentage of the cost of such a scheme that the Government are prepared to contribute; in this case, the Government have offered to contribute between £95 million and £105 million, and invited the local community to consider ways in which it could provide the balance of funding required. We are discussing with the local authorities concerned proposals they have put to us on how this might be done.

Centro—West Midlands PTE—estimates that the scheme will lead to the creation of around 1,300 jobs, including those involved in its construction. It has submitted grant applications for two further lines, one from Snow Hill station to the national exhibition centre and Birmingham international airport, and one from Wolverhampton, through Walsall, to Dudley and Brierley Hill.

London Buses

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the cost of fitting London buses with particulate control technology.

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for London Transport.

Ticketing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to implement a 13-week bus and rail card in and around London, similar to the one being introduced in Birmingham.

Mr. Norris: Ticketing arrangements are a matter for the relevant operators.

Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has made of the use of fiscal means for encouraging the refurbishment of heavy duty diesel vehicles with particulate control technology to reduce exhaust emissions and the introduction of low sulphur fuel.

Mr. Norris: None.

Old Sarum Airfield

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons Old Sarum airfield, Salisbury, has not been considered in his review of policy on public safety zones; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The current stage of our review has principally been concerned with broad policy rather than with its application to individual airports.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report,* column *482*, if he has now received representations from the Channel Islands on nuclear waste shipments.

Mr. Norris *[pursuant to his reply 27 February 1995 column 464]:* I have now received a fax dated 7 February sent to the Secretary of State by Mr. Peter Shanks of Guernsey Friends of the Earth expressing concern about the recent shipment of nuclear waste from France to Japan in a UK-registered vessel.

I regret that this has only just come to light.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Information Super-highway

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Ministers are responsible in each Department for co-ordinating the Government's approach to the information super-highway;

(2) which Minister is the overall co-ordinator for developing the Government's policy and approach to the information super-highway.

Mr. Ian Taylor: As the Minister with responsibility for telecommunications and technology, I represented the United Kingdom at the recent G7 conference on the information society, and am playing a leading role in

co-ordinating the development of Government's policy on information super-highways. I have set up a multimedia industry advisory committee which brings together industry experts, and specialists in health and education technologies, with the aim of assessing the policy implications of the development of multimedia and the opportunities for multimedia applications and communications. Ministers throughout Government are working together to help the UK make the best possible use of information super-highways and multimedia applications, and I am in close consultation with them. For example, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage are both Members of the MMIAC.

I mentioned these matters in evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee on 25 January 1995.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Details on the percentage of staff with disabilities employed by the Department were given in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *139–42*.

The Department of Trade and Industry is committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all its staff, including staff with disabilities.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Crown post offices there were in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Great Britain in each year since 1990.

Mr. Page: I understand from the Post Office that the numbers of Crown post offices in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Great Britain in each year since 1990 are as follows:

	Lancashire	*Great Britain*
1 April 1990	21	1,315
1 April 1991	19	1,143
1 April 1992	17	997
1 April 1993	16	896
1 April 1994	13	782

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the current members of the Coal Authority; what qualifications they possess; and what will be their annual salary.

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the answers my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 31 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *992–93*, and the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *706–07*.

Airbags

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cars built or assembled in the United Kingdom last year were fitted with *(a)* airbags and *(b)* airbags manufactured in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Page: The information is not available without incurring a disproportionate cost.

Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the representations he has received recently in respect of the activities of Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 3 March 1995]*: In the last three months my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has received two representations. These were from hon. Members.

EMPLOYMENT

Pay

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average increase in real take-home pay for all workers between *(a)* 1973–74 and 1978–79 and *(b)* 1978–79 and 1993–94.

Mr. Oppenheim: Real take-home pay for a single worker on average earnings fell by 2 per cent. between 1973–74 and 1978–79 and increased by 48 per cent. between 1978–79 and 1993–94. Real take-home pay for a married couple with two children, on average earnings, also fell by 2 per cent. between 1973–74 and 1978–79 and increased by 41 per cent. between 1978–79 and 1993–94.

Fire Safety

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of state for Employment what cost-benefit analysis he has made of the proposals in the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement to make the Fire Precautions Act 1971 a relevant statutory provision of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Mr. Oppenheim: Responses to consultation on the report "Fire Safety Legislation and Enforcement" are still being analysed. Decisions by Ministers will, in due course, be informed by examination of the costs and benefits of each option considered.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he intends to lay before the House his draft safety signs regulations.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Commission have recently submitted the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. They are considering the draft regulations in the normal way and an announcement will be made in due course.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to adopt collaborative bids to help regions to improve economic development.

Mr. Paice: Local bodies are already encouraged to adopt a collaborative approach to bidding for funds from the single regeneration budget to support economic development and regeneration.

South Thames TEC

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department is seeking to be a preferential creditor following the collapse of South Thames training and enterprise council.

Mr. Paice: The Department is a secured creditor of South Thames training and enterprise council by virtue of the debenture it has with the TEC.

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what meetings he and his ministers have had with training agencies who had contracted with South Thames TEC, since the TEC's collapse.

Mr. Paice: None of the Ministers of this Department has had any meetings with training agencies who had contracted with South Thames training and enterprise council since the appointment of the receiver by South Thames TEC. However, officials from the Government office for London have been in contact with most providers.

Employment Initiatives

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what correspondence he has had with Coventry and Warwickshire Ltd. about its recent report on economic regeneration in that area; what plans he has to use these data in the future when deciding on funding in this area; and what regional characteristics he considers when developing employment initiatives for the west midlands.

Mr. Paice: My officials will be responding to the consultative document. The strategic report due to be produced as a result of the consultation process will be used to access any bids the partnership may make for Government support in the future.

I am responsible for the design of national employment initiatives to meet the Government's commitment to improving business competitiveness. These initiatives are delivered by local training and enterprise councils who are responsible for ensuring that they are tailored to meet the needs of their area.

South London TEC

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what claims were made by his Department on South London training and enterprise council for repayment of unsubstantiated claims made on his Department in earlier periods by the council.

Mr. Paice: During the last financial year, the Department claimed and recovered £10,000 as part of the routine visits under the financial appraisal and monitoring system. However, further substantive work undertaken by the Department and the National Audit Office identified a significant amount of unsubstantiated claims. At present, work is continuing with providers and the receiver to establish the final number of unsubstantiated claims for the last financial year. A similar exercise is also under way to establish the validity of the current year's unsubstantiated claims before 7 November 1994.

Airbag Detonators

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which sites in the United Kingdom currently hold the licences necessary for the manufacture of airbag detonators.

Mr. Oppenheim: This information is not available in the form requested.

Airbag detonators, normally referred to as airbag igniters, are explosive devices and, if manufactured in the UK, are subject to licensing under the Explosive Act 1875. However, such licenses are normally written in general terms and therefore it is not possible to identify specifically those premises manufacturing airbag igniters.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: A total of 3.9 per cent. of staff in the Employment Department Group were registered as disabled at 1 July 1994, the latest date for which figures are available. The Department also employs other people with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

TREASURY

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: At 1 July 1994, 0.9 per cent. of Treasury staff were registered as disabled. The Treasury also employs a number of people with disabilities who have chosen not to register, for whom figures are not available.

Taxpayers

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an estimate of the number of taxpayers in 1995–296 and the numbers of those who paid tax in each year from 1978–79 until 1994–295.

Sir George Young: Most people will pay some tax, either on their income or through expenditure on goods subject to indirect tax.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which the Government is required to consult before legislation proposals; and in respect of which bodies the Government must publish its response to advice supplied by them.

Mr. Nelson: There are none.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* have a statutory requirement to publish an annual report, *(c)* are required to lay an annual report before Parliament and *(d)* are required to publish their advice to Government.

Mr. Nelson: Of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Treasury the School Teachers'

Review Body has a statutory base and there is a statutory requirement to publish its reports.

Postal Services (VAT)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the revenue from the imposition of the standard rate of VAT on public postal services in the United Kingdom;

(2) what plans he has to safeguard the VAT exemption on public postal services;

(3) if he will make a statement on the EU Commission's plans to review the VAT-exempt status given to public postal services.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The exemption from VAT on the public postal services in 1994–95 was estimated to be £200 million.

VAT exemption on public postal services is safeguarded by the EC sixth VAT directive.

The Government are unable to make any comment until such time as the Commission makes known its plans or proposals with regard to the current VAT-exempt status of the public postal services.

Tax Reliefs

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, given the provision in Finance Act 1994, extending relief from a deemed benefit in kind to include sole traders as well as partnerships, the Inland Revenue will not be seeking tax on any open assessments under this section where, had the new rules applied, there would be no liability.

Sir George Young: The changes in the 1994 Finance Act to the taxation of beneficial loan arrangements take effect from the tax year 1994–95. It is not proper for the Inland Revenue to anticipate those changes in any assessments for earlier years which happen still to be open. Such discretion would result in some taxpayers being more favourably treated than others, simply because they had more open assessment.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors were taken into account when deciding to extend relief from a deemed benefit in kind to include sole traders as well as partnerships as provided for in the Finance Act 1994.

Sir George Young: Where an employee obtains a cheap or interest-free loan from his employer, he is taxed on the value of the benefit. The amount of the taxable benefit is the interest, or extra interest, he would have paid if the loan had been on ordinary commercial terms. But if the loan is used for a purpose which would have enabled commercial interest on it to qualify for tax relief, the extra tax payable on the benefit may be reduced or cancelled out. The purpose of giving relief in this way is so that an employee with a cheap loan used for a qualifying purpose pays the same amount of tax as one who is paid extra salary to meet the interest he is charged on a commercial loan used for the same purpose. Before the Finance Act 1994, this was not always achieved. Where an employee used a cheap or interest-free loan provided by his employer in a separate business in which he was a partner, tax relief was normally available, but there was no tax relief where the loan was used in a business in which the employee was the sole proprietor.

The 1994 Finance Act amended the rules for taxing cheap or interest-free loans. From 6 April 1994, tax relief is available for cheap or interest-free loans used by an employee in a separate business, whether he is a partner or the sole proprietor. This brought into line the treatment of all cheap or interest-free loans, so that tax relief is available in the same way as for interest on loans used for other purposes such as home loans.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the figures in tables 6, 7 and 10 of the "Tax Ready Reckoner" and "Tax Reliefs", published in July 1994 to take account of the Budget and subsequent financial statement; and if he will include the equivalent full-year costs or yields.

Sir George Young: Updated versions of the ready-reckoners are in the tables. The changes are from a base incorporating the levels of tax allowances and so on for 1995–96 announced in the November 1994 Budget. Updated estimates of the costs of tax expenditure and structural reliefs are not available. They will be included in the next edition of the "Tax Ready-Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" booklet to be published in the summer.

Direct effects of illustrative changes in income tax[1]

£ million

	Full year cost/yield 1995–96	*Receipts cost/yield 1995–96*	*1996–97*
Rates			
Change lower rate by 1p[2]	520	800	650
Change basic rate by 1p	1,900	1,700	2,000
Change higher rate by 1p	460	290	470
Allowances			
Change personal allowance by £100	600	490	620
Change age-related personal allowance by £100[3]	60	45	60
Change married couple's allowance by £100[4]	150	120	150
Change age-related married couple's allowance by £100[3]	14	11	14
Change aged income limit by £500	14	7	13
Change all personal allowances by 1 per cent.[5]	240	190	250
Change all personal allowances by 10 per cent.[5]	2,350	1,900	2,450
Change married couple's and related allowances by 1 per cent.[5]	30	25	30
Change married couple's and related allowances by 10 per cent.[5]	290	230	300
Lower rate band			
Increase lower rate band by 10 per cent.	330	260	330

Direct effects of illustrative changes in income tax[1]

£ million

	Full year cost/yield 1995–96	Receipts cost/yield 1995–96	1996–97
Basic rate limit			
Change basic rate limit by 1 per cent.[5]	90	65	90
Change basic rate limit by 10 per cent.[5]			
increase (cost)	810	570	820
decrease (yield)	1,000	730	1,050
Allowances, lower rate band and basic rate limit			
Change all main allowances, lower rate band and basic rate limit 1 per cent.[5]	390	310	400
Change all main allowances, lower rate band and basic rate limit by 10 per cent.[6]			
increase (cost)	3,800	2,950	3,900
decrease (yield)	4,200	3,250	4,300

Note:

[1] The estimates are rounded. The extent of rounding reflects the desire to avoid undue compounding of its effects when numbers are pro-rated, rather than the accuracy of the estimates. The figures include consequential effects on the yield of capital gains tax. Changes are assumed to take effect from April 1995.

[2] Including the effects of the change on receipts of ACT and on consequential liability to mainstream corporation tax.

[3] Allowances for those aged 65–74 and aged 75 and over.

[4] Figures include revenue effects of changing the additional personal allowance and widow's bereavement allowance by £100.

[5] Percentage changes are calculated with reference to 1994-95 levels, except for the married couple's allowance and related allowances, where they are calculated with reference to the 1995–96 levels announced in the November 1993 Budget.

Direct effects of illustrative changes in other direct taxes and national insurance contributions[1]

£ million

	Full year cost/yield 1995–96	Receipts cost/yield 1995–96	1996–97
Corporation tax[2]			
Change full rate by 1 percentage point	800	570	890
Change small companies' rate by 1 percentage point[3]	120	80	130
Capital gains tax			
Increase annual exempt amount by £500 for individuals and £250 for trustees	5	0	3
Inheritance tax			
Change rate by 1 percentage point	38	16	33
Increase threshold by £5000	38	16	32
National Insurance Contributions			
Change employee rate by 1 percentage point	2,020	1,810	2,070
Change main employer rate by 1 percentage point	2,530	2,270	2,620
Change all lower employer rates by 1 percentage point	440	390	430
Change Class 2 rate[4] by £1	110	70	100
Change Class 4 rate[5] by 1 percentage point	120	50	110

[1] The estimated revenue effects of the changes are rounded. The extent of rounding reflects the desire to avoid undue compounding of its effects when numbers are pro-rated, rather than the accuracy of the estimates. Changes are assumed to take effect from April 1995, except where otherwise specified.

[2] Assessment to corporation tax normally relates to the preceding year. These estimates are the changes to revenue that would occur if the changed rates were applied to profits from 1 April 1994.

[3] These figures ignore effects arising from the imputation system.

[4] Flat rate contributions payable by the self-employed with earnings above the small earnings exemption rate (£3,200).

[5] Profit related contributions payable by the self employed.

Uncollected Tax

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimated level of uncollected corporation tax *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* of current values and *(c)* as a percentage for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The board of the Inland Revenue allows individual remissions of tax as an aspect of their responsibilities for the "care and management" of the direct taxes under section 1(1), Taxes Management Act 1970.

Sound management requires that tax which is not collected and which cannot practicably be collected—for example, because the taxpayer is insolvent or his whereabouts are unknown—should be written off. Similarly, it is on occasion necessary to remit tax which it would be unconscionable to collect—for example, because the payment would cause gross hardship to the taxpayer. The level of remissions fell for account 93 and is expected to fall again in 1994.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of remissions of tax.

The amounts of corporation tax written off for each year since 1979 are as follows:

Year	Amount in thousands	As a percentage of total CT collected	£ Amount expressed in 1993 prices
1979	15,182	0.50	47,079
1980	16,214	0.49	44,116
1981	20,688	0.70	51,295
1982	34,396	0.89	77,888
1983	40,912	1.00	85,459
1984	58,051	1.23	113,034
1985	75,342	1.27	133,725
1986	91,365	1.11	150,489
1987	92,830	0.93	137,960
1988	225,597	1.92	301,357
1989	151,368	1.05	186,209
1990	184,725	1.17	210,984
1991	320,929	2.09	351,891
1992	542,233	4.64	571,717
1993	417,814	4.21	417,814
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and consequently the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1993 prices.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimated level of uncollected capital gains tax *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* at current values and *(c)* as a percentage for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The board of the inland Revenue allows individual remissions of tax as an aspect of their responsibilities for the "care and management" of the direct taxes under section 1(1), Taxes Management Act 1970.

Sound management requires that tax which is not collected and which cannot practicably be collected—that is because the taxpayer is insolvent or his whereabouts are unknown—should be written off. Similarly, it is on occasion necessary to remit tax which it would be unconscionable to collect—that is because the payment would cause gross hardship to the taxpayer. The amount remitted fell for account 93 and is expected to fall again in 1994.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of remissions of tax.

The amounts of capital gains tax written off for each year since 1979 are as follows:

Year	Amount in thousands	As a percentage of total CGT collected	£ Amount Expressed in 1993 prices
1979	3,048	0.73	9,452
1980	3,591	0.71	9,771
1981	2,734	0.61	6,779
1982	4,868	0.78	11,023
1983	6,496	1.01	13,561
1984	5,998	0.4	11,679
1985	7,562	0.93	13,422
1986	10,064	0.99	16,576
1987	8,822	0.79	13,111
1988	12,680	0.80	16,938
1989	10,864	0.47	13,365
1990	12,002	0.64	13,708
1991	29,721	1.58	32,588
1992	57,836	4.69	60,981
1993	50,397	4.56	50,397
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and consequently the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1993 prices.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimated level of uncollected schedule D tax *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as current values and *(c)* as a percentage for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The board of the Inland Revenue allows individual remissions of tax as an aspect of their responsibilities for the "care and management" of the direct taxes under section 1(1), Taxes Management Act 1970.

Sound management requires that tax which is not collected and which cannot be practicably collected—for example, because the taxpayer is insolvent or his whereabouts are unknown—should be written off. Similarly, it is on occasion necessary to remit tax which it would be unconscionable to collect—for example, because the payment would cause gross hardship to the taxpayer. The amount remitted fell for account 93 and is expected to fall again in 1994.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of remissions of tax.

The amounts of schedule D tax written off for each year since 1979 are as follows:

Year	Amount in thousands	As a percentage of total schedule D collected	£ Amount expressed in 1993 prices
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	33,081	0.79	90,010
1981	41,552	0.75	103,028
1982	52,763	0.84	119,479
1983	68,536	1.04	143,078
1984	91,229	1.32	177,636
1985	90,196	1.18	160,090
1986	124,297	1.29	204,732
1987	133,878	1.88	198,964
1988	252,424	3.06	337,193
1989	242,024	2.53	297,731
1990	254,989	2.35	291,237
1991	383,566	3.17	420,571
1992	703,422	5.16	741,670
1993	701,787	5.58	701,787
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and consequently the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1993 prices.

Separate figures are not available for 1979.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimated level of uncollected PAYE and national insurance contributions deducted but not paid over to the Revenue *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* at current values and *(c)* as a percentage for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The board of the Inland Revenue allows individual remissions of tax as an aspect of their responsibilities for the "care and management" of the direct taxes under Section 1(1), Taxes Management Act 1970.

Sound management requires that tax which is not collected and which cannot practicably be collected—for example, because the taxpayer is insolvent or his whereabouts are unknown—should be written off.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of remissions of tax.

The amounts of PAYE and national insurance contributions uncollected and consequently remitted for written off for each year since 1979 are as follows:

Year	*PAYE amounts in £ thousands*	*As a percentage of total PAYE collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 prices*	*Classes 1 and 1A NIC amount in £ thousands*	*As a percentage of total NIC classes 1 and 1A collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 prices*
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	9,914	0.05	26,975	1,056	0.01	2,873
1981	11,432	0.08	28,345	1,158	0.01	2,871
1982	15,281	0.06	34,603	1,261	0.01	2,855
1983	22,622	0.08	47,227	1,555	0.01	3,246
1984	33,312	0.11	64,863	1,971	0.01	3,838
1985	46,695	0.14	82,879	2,213	0.01	3,928
1986	60,915	0.17	100,334	4,377	0.02	7,209
1987	92,560	0.25	137,559	8,514	0.03	12,653
1988	130,724	0.33	174,624	15,894	0.06	21,231
1989	122,890	0.28	151,176	15,127	0.05	18,609
1990	107,091	0.22	122,314	17,239	0.05	19,689
1991	135,285	0.26	148,307	21,644	0.06	23,732
1992	381,172	0.71	401,898	32,570	0.09	34,341
1993	388,190	0.72	388,190	41,257	0.1	41,257
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n.a	n/a

The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and consequently the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1993 prices.

Separate figures are not available for 1979.

Tax Collection Staff

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many collection staff were working for the Inland Revenue; and how many were working in the areas of *(a)* capital gains tax; *(b)* schedule D tax, *(c)* corporation tax, *(d)* PAYE and *(e)* national insurance contributions in each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: Excluding staff employed on central administration, the table sets out the total numbers of Inland Revenue staff engaged on the collection of tax within the Department's accounts offices, local network, and enforcement offices for each year since 1978–79 and how many were working in the areas of *(a)* capital gains tax, *(b)* schedule D tax, *(c)* corporation tax and *(d)* PAYE. Under *(d)* the figures include staff used in collecting PAYE from employers and a relatively small number of schedule E tax assessments. As resource usage of national insurance contribution work is incidental to mainstream tax collection it is not separately recorded.

Year	*Total*	*Capital gains tax*	*Schedule D tax*	*Corporation tax*	*PAYE*
1978–79	11,041	135	5,873	560	4,473
1979–80	10,648	148	5,701	584	4,215
1980–81	10,222	143	5,529	597	3,953
1981–82	10,124	126	5,747	409	3,842
1982–83	10,221	116	5,673	390	4,042
1983–84	10,171	113	5,570	394	4,094
1984–85	9,339	92	4,674	557	4,016
1985–86	8,443	92	4,596	559	3,196
1986–87	7,989	85	4,472	530	2,902
1987–88	7,795	105	4,250	538	2,902
1988–89	7,866	121	4,243	571	2,931
1989–90	7,879	92	4,243	570	2,974
1990–91	7,846	79	4,410	549	2,808
1991–92	8,187	70	4,376	532	3,209
1992–93	8,410	69	4,730	492	3,119
1993–94	8,173	68	4,695	465	2,945

Capital

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current interest rate differential between publicly provided capital for the national health service education and British Rail and capital raised through his private finance initiative.

Sir George Young: For appraisal purposes, the pre-tax cost of capital for central Government activities is normally taken as 6 per cent. in real terms, or its nominal equivalent. For nationalised industries, financial objectives are specified in terms of a required rate of return of 8 per cent. in real terms. The cost of capital raised for projects under the private finance initiative will depend on the creditworthiness of the body concerned and the types of financing which best fit the project.

Cross-border Shopping

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual loss of tax revenue from cross-border shopping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The latest annual estimates were included in HM Customs and Excise's submission to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and published in the Committee's report on 23 November 1994, 1994–95 Session, 1st report, HC35.

Fraud

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *401*, in what form the data on fraud are collected.

Sir George Young: The current reporting arrangements are set out in chapter 37 of "Government Accounting". The chapter includes the form to be used by Departments in reporting fraud.

Living Standards

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the change in the standard of living of manual workers in manufacturing relative to white-collar workers in the private sector since 1979.

Mr. Aitken: Figures based on data from the new earnings survey show that between 1979 and 1994 average gross real earnings of manual workers in manufacturing rose by 20 per cent., compared to 57 per cent. for non-manual workers in the private sector as a whole.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the percentage change in Britain's gross domestic product since the first quarter of 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The growth in real GDP—gross domestic product at constant factor cost—between the first quarter of 1990 and the fourth quarter of 1994 was 4.2 per cent.

Price Stability

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the relative priority attached by Her Majesty s Government to price stability and to maximising living standards.

Mr. Aitken: The objective of the Government's economic policy is to promote sustainable growth and increasing prosperity. Permanently low inflation, combined with sound public finances and structural policies to improve the long-term performance of the economy, is the best way to achieve this objective.

National Power and PowerGen

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Government's sale of substantially all of its shareholdings in National Power Plc and PowerGen plc.

Sir George Young: I am pleased to report that the Government's United Kingdom public offer and international offers of National Power and PowerGen shares were successfully completed this morning, when dealings in interim rights started on the London Stock Exchange.

As a result of bids received in the international offers, the prices of the third instalments for all investors in the UK public offer and the international offers were set at 136p per National Power interim right and 142p per PowerGen interim right.

Accordingly, the price for National Power interim rights purchased in the UK public offer was 476p per share, comprising 170p paid on successful application, 170p to be paid by 6 February 1996 and 136p to be paid by 17 September 1996.

The price for PowerGen interim rights purchased in the United Kingdom public offer was 512p per share, comprising 185p paid on successful application, 185p to be paid by 6 February 1996 and 142p to be paid by 17 September 1996.

The price for interim rights purchased in the international offer of National Power shares was 486p per share, comprising 180p paid on successful application, 170p to be paid by 6 February 1996 and 136p to be paid by 17 September 1996.

The price for interim rights purchased in the international offer of PowerGen shares was 522p per share, comprising 195p paid on successful application, 185p to be paid by 6 February 1996 and 142p to be paid by 17 September 1996.

The Government offered for sale up to 371.8 million National Power shares and 238.3 million PowerGen shares in the UK public offer and the international offers.

Some 1.1 million applications were received in the UK public offer for a total of some 367 million National Power and some 245 million PowerGen shares. This represented two times the share initially expected to be sold in the UK public offer. In response to this demand, the Government increased the total number of shares allotted to the UK public offer to 229 million National Power and 153 million PowerGen shares. At this level, the number of shares applied for in the UK public offer represented some 1.6 times the share available.

Over 98 per cent. of applicants in the UK public offer received an allocation of shares. Half of all applicants had their applications met in full.

Almost 248,000 qualifying National Power and PowerGen shareholders and more than 2,600 eligible National Power and PowerGen employees made applications in the UK public offer. All such applicants

received an allocation of National Power or PowerGen shares, as appropriate.

Excluding the retail tender, 108.5 million National Power shares and 56.1 million PowerGen shares were allocated to bidders in the international offers. This number does not include any shares that Kleinwort Benson Ltd. and Barclays de Zoete Wedd Securities Ltd. may have over-allotted in connection with the international offers. The extent of any such over-allotment will not be disclosed until later. As already announced, Kleinwort Benson Ltd. and Barclays de Zoete Wedd Securities Ltd. may also effect stabilisation transactions.

Individual investors bidding in the UK retail tender bid for some 24 million shares in National Power and 28 million shares in PowerGen. Of these numbers, some 10 million shares and some 12 million shares, respectively, were in respect of PEP applications.

In addition to the shares sold in the UK public offer and the International Offers, Kleinwort Benson Ltd. and Barclays de Zoete Wedd Securities Ltd. as global co-ordinators for the sale, hold an option to acquire from Her Majesty's Treasury up to a further 37.2 million National Power and 23.8 million PowerGen shares for the purpose of meeting any over-allotment made by them in connection with the relevant International Offer. This option must be exercised by 5 April 1995.

Pursuant to an agreement with HM Treasury, National Power plc purchased 98 million shares in conjunction with the offers, at a price consistent with the international offer price. Total gross proceeds from this purchase amount to some £453 million and will be received in this financial year.

Similarly, pursuant to an agreement to HM Treasury, PowerGen plc has purchased 60 million shares in conjunction with the offers, at a price consistent with the international offer price. Total gross proceeds amount to some £292 million and will be received in this financial year.

Total gross proceeds from the UK public offer, the international offers and share repurchases amount to some £3,642 million, of which some £1,782 million is expected to be received in this financial year.

Total gross proceeds may be further increased by a maximum of £305 million to the extent that, if at all, the global co-ordinator, Kleinwort Benson Ltd and Barclays de Zoete Wedd Securities Ltd. exercises its option to acquire further shares.

The costs to the Government of the National Power and PowerGen shares offers, and of the share repurchase arrangements, are estimated to be as follows:

UK Offers	*£ million*
Marketing	15.2
Share Shop Commissions	18.7
Prospectus production and distribution	0.6
Receiving Banks	3.1
Advisers' fees and expenses	7.9
Total (UK Offers)	45.6
International Offers commissions and other costs	15.1
Total (UK and Overseas Offers)	60.7

Those costs represent about 1.7 per cent. of the estimated total proceeds due from the sale of shares—excluding any shares that the global co-ordinator have an option to purchase. The costs exclude stamp duty and VAT on services provided to the Government, which are not net costs to the Exchequer. There will be some further expenditure in 1995–96 onwards in respect of instalment collection and the issue of bonus shares.

Following the offers, the purchase of shares by National Power and PowerGen and assuming the exercise in full of the option over National Power and PowerGen shares granted by Her Majesty's Treasury to Kleinwort Benson Ltd. and Barlcays de Zoete Wedd Securities Ltd., Her Majesty's Treasury expects to hold not more than 1 per cent. of the issued share capital of either company. These amounts comprise principally shares that may be needed to meet share bonus entitlements under the UK public offer.

Muriel Nissel

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library of Muriel Nissel's article written for the latest issue of *Social Trends* but not published.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The article Mrs. Nissel submitted to the CSO was not included in the latest edition of *Social Trends*. However, I understand that it will be published in a forthcoming edition of the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*. Copies of the journal are available in the House of Commons Library.

Barings Bank

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to public funds for the Bank of England of the Bank's offer to provide liquidity for the rescue of Barings; and if he will instruct the Bank to make no further offers of this nature.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* As my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on Monday 27 February, the Bank of England stands ready to provide liquidity to the banking system to ensure that it continues to function normally. There was no rescue of Barings and the Governor did not recommend that public funds should be used for this purpose.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made as to by what method and to what extent the asset management arm of Barings is ring fenced to protect it from any disadvantageous situations arising in its other divisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* Barings is now in the hands of the administrators. The regulatory requirements applying to fund management should protect the fund management arm from losses elsewhere in the group, but any investors' cash balances held on deposit at Barings Bank will be frozen. Current discussions between the administrators and the ING Group raise the prospect that a favourable settlement may be obtained.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the position of local authorities who had money on short-term deposit with Barings bank; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding reply 2 March 1995]:* The administrators are currently engaged in identifying the options for realising maximum benefits for creditors of Barings. Current discussions between the administrators and the ING Group raise the prospect that a favourable settlement may be obtained, but until the administration order is lifted, deposits remain frozen.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that no public money will be used directly or indirectly in any attempt to rescue Barings and that the Bank of England should not put any of its own money at risk in such a rescue attempt.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* As my right hon. and learned Friend, the Chancellor told the House on Monday 27 February, the Governor did not recommend, and in any event he would not have agreed, that public funds should be used to rescue Barings.

Derivatives Markets

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for regulation of derivative markets to ensure that the bank exposure is geared to a fixed ratio to the capital of the bank concerned.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* We have no current proposals for further regulation of derivatives. The Bank of England already sets a variety of capital requirements for credit institutions depending on the nature of business in which they are engaged. The capital adequacy directive, which comes into force at the end of this year, provides for EU-wide rules on the capital which must be held against market risks, including those involved in derivatives markets.

As my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on Monday 27 February, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. Any lessons to be drawn must await a thorough analysis.

Banks (Regulation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the Bank of England power to inspect the operations and control structures, and audit the accounts of, all overseas operations of subsidiaries of British banks.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* The Banking Act 1987 already gives the Bank of England extensive powers to supervise the worldwide operations of UK authorised institutions. These powers do not, however, apply directly to non-banking subsidiaries. Their supervision requires co-operation with other relevant regulators. As my right hon. and learned Friend, the Chancellor told the House on Monday 27 February, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. Any lessons to be drawn must await a thorough analysis.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what proposals he has for setting up an independent regulator with its own inspectors and audit teams to regulate banking.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* The Bank of England already discharges these responsibilities.

PRIME MINISTER

Northern Region

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's achievements in the northern region since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The Government have had many achievements in the northern region since 1979 as our policies have created a favourable economic climate for growth. During this period the region has undergone the biggest transformation since the 19th century with the emergence of a new and diverse industrial base. Pharmaceutical, food processing, clothing, light engineering, electronics and car manufacture have replaced traditional industries. In the area covered by the Government office for the north-east this change has come about through a range of measures:

- the attraction of £3 billion overseas investment since 1985, the most notable successes of which were Nissan and Samsung and a further £1.3 billion private sector investment into the areas covered by the Tyne and Wear and Teesside Development Corporations since 1987, creating and safeguarding over 30,000 jobs;
- over 5,500 hectares of derelict land reclaimed, including over 700 by the Urban Development Corporations in Tyne and Wear and on Teesside;
- in partnership with other organisations, the region's Training and Enterprise Councils have successfully developed innovative solutions to the training and enterprise needs of their areas including the establishment of a business Innovation Centre in Sunderland and a management training and higher education facility in Northumberland. TEC's in the region have also piloted a number of new initiatives: Open Learning Credits, Youth Credits, Adult Credits, the Out of School Childcare Grant, Workstart and Skillchoice.;
- assisting over 26,000 unemployed people to start their own businesses since 1987 through the Businesses Start Up Scheme run by Training and Enterprise Councils;
- 820,000 people placed in jobs by the Employment Service since 1986;
- unemployment has fallen by 16,100 or nearly 10 per cent. since the national peak in December 1992;
- a substantial number of homes built and improved;
- over 4,000 jobs created, 5,000 jobs preserved and 550 new businesses assisted by the South Tyneside and Stockton and Thornaby Task Force; and,
- an increase in the numbers of young people staying in full-time education after reaching school leaving age. 12.4 per cent of those leaving schools in the region in 1992–93 intended to pursue a Degree course.

The region also piloted the development of job clubs, now a successful national programme and expects to become the first to have contracted out careers services and to have facilitated a comprehensive network of Business Links.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Internet E-mail numbers of all Government Ministers.

The Prime Minister: It is a matter for individual Ministers to decide whether to make public their Internet electronic mail addresses. The two Ministers with responsibility for use of the Internet are the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science and the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whose E-mail addresses are publicly available.

Government Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what role the Cabinet plays in the formulation of *(a)* economic policy, *(b)* monetary policy and *(c)* policy on a single European currency.

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet is the ultimate arbitrator of all aspects of Government policy.

Social Development Summit

Ms Corston: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his Answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *412*, if the Minister for Overseas Development, in representing him at the Heads of State world summit for social development in Copenhagen, is responsible for negotiating those aspects of the draft declaration and action programme covering national action within the United Kingdom to reduce inequality and poverty and promote full employment and social integration.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will represent me at the high level segment of the summit on 11-12 March. My right hon. and noble Friend will make a statement setting out the United Kingdom perspective on the issues covered by the summit.

Ms Corston: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *412*, if he will publish briefs which have been prepared by his Government for discussion at the world summit for social development about social development and anti-poverty measures taken and proposed to be taken in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: There are no plans to do so. It is not usual to publish briefing provided by officials to Ministers. The speeches of my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State for Overseas Development will be published, and copies will be placed in the Library.

Lockerbie

Dr. Godman: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has which would allow Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the United States of America to resolve the Lockerbie affair other than by way of instituting criminal proceeding in Scotland or the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Lockerbie bombing was a crime committed against a United States aircraft over Scotland. It has been investigated from Scotland with the co-operation of the United States authorities. The trial of those accused of this terrible crime must take place in Scotland or the United States. This has been confirmed by the UN Security Council.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton the role in Beirut in 1988 of Ron Carviene, Bill Leyene and Dan O'Connor, under the command of Matthew Gannon and Charles McKee.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had when he last met President Clinton on the subject of the setting up of an international court to try those persons alleged to have perpetrated the murders of the passengers and crew members of Pan Am flight 103 and residents of Lockerbie in December 1988; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the memorandum for No. 10 Downing street in 1989 adducing the reasons why Her Majesty's Government would not allow the public inquiry into the Lockerbie crime; and at what level the decision on the public inquiry was taken.

The Prime Minister: It is not usual practice to place internal Government correspondence in the Library. I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Linlithgow on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *20*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his letter of 30 August 1994 to the hon. Member for Linlithgow what examination has taken place of the Toshiba and Helsinki warnings in relation to Lockerbie since the fatal accident inquiry.

The Prime Minister: The fatal accident inquiry, which took place 22 months after the disaster, examined both warnings in some detail. In his determination, the Sheriff Principal concluded that the so-called Toshiba warning was not relevant to the circumstances of the deaths and that the so-called Helsinki warning lacked credibility. It has therefore not been considered necessary to conduct further examinations into these.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what representations Her Majesty's Government have had from the German Government about their interrogation of Edwin Bolliers's Statsi control and the sale of timing devices to the Statsi.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss the implications with President Clinton of the FBI briefing paper regarding Iranian links and baggage being unloaded on Air Malta 180 destination Frankfurt airport.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if British authorities have interviewed Marwin Khreesat, a bomb maker, briefly detained and then released in Neuss, Germany;

(2) if he will put the transcript of the interview with Mr. Ghandanfar and Mr. Dalkamouni in the Library.

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, it would be wrong to reveal details of the evidence in a criminal case while proceedings are pending.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ask Chancellor Kohl the reasons why in October 1988 the Verfassungschütz released certain Palestinians and their bomb-making equipment.

The Prime Minister: The release of detainees from German prisons is a matter entirely for the German authorities.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with Chancellor Kohl the prima facie evidence that a German-based terrorist organisation used its knowledge of a covert United States drugs operation to switch an unaccompanied bag containing drugs with an identical bag containing a bomb which destroyed Pan Am Flight 103.

The Prime Minister: The allegation has been examined. No evidence has been found to support it.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from Lockerbie victims' families regarding information conveyed to them by

members of the United States commission about the extent of the information available to United States and United Kingdom Governments and the probability of its publication; what elements of the United States commission's findings support the families' version; and if he will place in the Library the United Kingdom responses to these findings.

The Prime Minister: I have recently received a letter from the family of a Lockerbie victim which referred to the United States President's commission on aviation security and terrorism. A copy of the commission's report, dated May 1990 will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment Her Majesty's Government has made of the role of Khaled Jaafar, a Lebanese victim of the Lockerbie bombing.

The Prime Minister: The fatal accident inquiry in 1990–91 considered allegations of involvement of Khaled Jaafar in the bombing. In his determination, the sheriff principal concluded that there was no connection between Mr. Jaafar and the suitcase which contained the bomb.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister on what evidence British officials publicly dismissed a document of the United States Air Force, air intelligence unit, asserting that Ali Akbar Mostashemi, former Iranian Interior Minister, paid $10 million to terrorist gangs to carry out the attack on Pan Am Flight 103 in December 1988, as based on dud intelligence.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave the hon. Gentleman on 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *299-300*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of American reports about the destruction of Pan Am 103, based on reports from defecting Iranian pilots.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave the hon. Gentleman on 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *299-300*

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 25 January, what strategy, other than demanding a trial of Libyan suspects, Her Majesty's Government have for obtaining justice for all the victims of the crime of Lockerbie.

The Prime Minister: The Lockerbie investigation has been the most exhaustive ever undertaken in this country. It remains open but has to date uncovered evidence to support charges against the two Libyans accused. Our demands, endorsed by the United Nations Security Council have been for the surrender of the accused for trial in the United States or Scotland, the satisfaction of French justice over the bombing of UTA 772, the payment of appropriate compensation and concrete proof from Libya that it has renounced terrorism. I can see no other means of meeting the legitimate demands for justice than by trial of the persons alleged to be responsible before a criminal court properly exercising jurisdiction in respect of these matters.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government were informed on or about 19 December 1988 of the travel plans of Major Charles McKee by the US Drug Enforcement Agency in Cyprus.

The Prime Minister: No. I understand Major McKee was not an employee of the DEA.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if, pursuant to his answer on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *571*, he will identify the partners to whom he referred in relation to discussions about Lockerbie and UTH 772.

The Prime Minister: The United States, France, other EU states and other friendly countries. We work most closely with the United States and France, the other states most seriously affected by the Lockerbie and UTA bombings. The Lockerbie issue is raised in bilateral contacts with a wide range of countries.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what information came to Her Majesty's Government about approaches by members of the Juafar family offering precise testimony about Hezbollah and Achmed Tibril and their role in using a member of the Juafar family to get a bomb on board Pan Am Flight 103.

The Prime Minister: No such approaches have been received.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what reports the United Kingdom and the United States authorities in Cyprus received from Mr. David Lovejoy, an employee of the United States Government directly or through other sources on the movements of the United States hostage rescue team, including Matthew Gannon and Major Charles McKee subsequently killed at Lockerbie, before the destruction of Pan Am 103; and if he will discuss with President Clinton the reasons why these reports were sought.

The Prime Minister: The British authorities in Cyprus neither sought nor received any such reports.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his Private Secretary, Mr. Edward Oakden's letter of 18 January to the relatives of the Lockerbie victims, if he will bring forward proposals whereby fatal accident inquiry presiding judges can have access to intelligence information.

The Prime Minister: Section 4(3) of the Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths (Scotland) Act 1976 requires that, subject to an exception relating to the reporting of matters affecting persons under the age of 17, any fatal accident inquiry shall be open to the public. There are no proposals to amend that provision.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 15 February on Lockerbie, if he will list the witnesses interviewed by the German authorities at the request of, or in consultation with, the Scottish authorities and on what dates; and on what occasions Scottish officers were present, assisting at interviews.

The Prime Minister: Disclosure of the fact the Messrs Ghadanfar and Dalkamouni were interviewed was an exceptional step taken only because of the unwarranted criticisms which had been, and were continuing to be, made of the German authorities and the Scottish police. It would not be appropriate to go beyond this by discussing details of confidential communications between the Scottish police and prosecuting authorities and their counterparts in Germany, or indeed in any other country.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *300*, in what month of what year allegations were first made to the effect that Ali Akbar Mostashemi had paid $10 million to have the Lockerbie bombing carried out; who were the competent authorities to whom the Prime Minister refers; and how much of the

alleged contradicting material came from Abdul Meged Jiacha.

The Prime Minister: This allegation first appeared in the British press in September 1989. I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Gentleman on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *299-300*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton the statement of Mr. Vincent Cannistraro, head of the CIA counter-terrorism operations until 1990, that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine general command was implicated in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 and had been planning other operations against United States and Israeli targets when some of its members' squad were arrested in Frankfurt and that the operation had been bankrolled by Iranians.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton the posting of warnings about Pan Am flight 103 on United States embassy bulletin boards, and the subsequent United States directive requiring imprisonment of officials, should they discuss warnings with family, friends, and colleagues in the absence of a public warning.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

European Courts

Dr. Godman: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with the leaders of the other member states of the European Union, on the modification of structure, membership and functions of *(a)* the European Court of Auditors, *(b)* the European court of first instance, and *(c)* the European Court of Justice; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We did not discuss these issues at the last European Council meeting in Essen, but, as I said in my December statement to the House, we did emphasise that, in the interests of combating fraud and waste, the Council must ensure that the Court of Auditors' reports are rigorously scrutinised and followed up.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he has taken to assist the speedy conclusion of the Scott inquiry and to ensure that the report is published before 1 May.

The Prime Minister: As I said when I announced the terms of reference for the inquiry on 16 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *74-75*, Lord Justice Scott will be entirely free to decide on the publication of his report. The inquiry will report to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. The Government continue to give Sir Richard Scott's inquiry the fullest possible co-operation.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: For these purposes, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I therefore refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Secretary Office of Public Service and Science gave the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 1 February, *Official Report*, column *712*.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, in what circumstances a public inquiry may take evidence on intelligence matters in camera.

The Prime Minister: Whether and to what extent a public inquiry may take evidence in camera depends on the powers given to the inquiry when it is established.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if the United Kingdom has an extradition treaty with Libya.

The Prime Minister: No.

Command Papers

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible, in 1994 giving, in each case, the total cost to the Exchequer of their publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* Her Majesty's Stationery Office aims to recover all production and distribution costs from the sales revenue of all White Papers and Green Papers which it publishes. The cost to my Office of the 1994 pay review body reports was approximately £8,000. Figures for 1980 are not available.

SCOTLAND

Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust most recently sought a meeting with him; what date the meeting took place; what matters were discussed; when the next meeting is planned; what matters will be discussed; if he intends to raise the matter of care in the community provision in Renfrewshire; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not received a request from the Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust for a meeting and there are no current plans for a meeting to be held at a future date.

My right hon. Friend looks forward to receiving a copy of Argyll and Clyde health board's draft joint community care plan. Only then can an assessment be made of the planned provision and its impact upon the services currently provided by the Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust.

Case Statistics

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many cases under summary procedure, have been brought to trial within 14 days by *(a)* the Paisley procurator fiscal, and *(b)* other procurator fiscal offices in the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not available. Procurators fiscal are required to keep a record only of the average number of weeks between pleading and trial diet. The period will vary according to the particulars of the case. For example, in custody cases under summary procedure, the trial must commence within 40 days of the bringing of the complaint in court. If the accused is not in custody, there is likely to be a delay of several weeks between the diets, unless the circumstances justify the fixing of an early trial diet. Early diets are often fixed in cases involving children or where the anticipated availability of particular witnesses makes an early diet desirable.

NHS Trusts

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what guidelines he has issued to NHS trusts in Scotland regarding the use of staff facilities including canteens and cafeterias, for hiring out for commercial catering functions; what guidelines he has issued to prohibit or discourage such practice and use; what assessment he has made of the practice of the Royal Alexandra hospital, Paisley; what action he intends to take; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what facilities are available in the Royal Alexandra hospital, Paisley for supplying hot meals to staff; for what reasons such facilities are not always available for staff use; what alternative arrangements are made on such occasions; and if he will make a statement;

(3) when the dance floor in the staff facilities at the Royal Alexander hospital in Paisley was installed; how much it cost; who approved the expenditure; what cost-benefit analysis was carried out; what were the results of that study; what are the precise projections of financial commercial gain to the trust; to what use any profit will be applied; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Section 7 of the Health and Medicines Act 1988 gives health bodies the power to generate additional funds to be used for the purposes of enhancing and improving patient care. Income generation is now an integral part of all NHS activity, but no specific guidance has been issued to NHS trusts regarding the use of staff facilities. It is for each NHS trust to determine opportunities for generating income from non-clinical activities.

There have only been two occasions when the main dining room at the Royal Alexander hospital has been closed for the night meal service. On these occasions staff were informed in advance that an alternative facility would be available in the maternity unit dining room, an area which is not normally open at night. Hot food was available to staff on both these occasions.

An area suitable for dancing was created within the dining room in December 1994 at a cost of £3,000. This was met from hospital endowment funds following approval by the trust's investments committee. The income generated will be re-invested in the endowment funds. No Exchequer funds were involved.

The dining room has been hired out for functions for a number of years, and the income received is invested in enhancing patient care services. The main impetus for improved social facilities came from hospital staff.

Procurator Fiscal's Office, Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of whether the procurator fiscal's office in the sheriffdom of Paisley has operated efficiently, effectively, objectively and impartially in all cases placed before it since 1984; if he will make particular reference to those cases involving people who were elected as a councillor at the time the charge was made against them; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will instruct an independent inquiry into the efficiency, effectiveness and operational and objective impartiality of the procurator fiscal's office in the Paisley sheriffdom;

(3) if he will make a statement on his assessment of the efficiency, effectiveness and operational and objective impartiality of the procurator fiscal's office in the Paisley sheriffdom since 1984;

(4) what is the normal involvement of the Crown Office in matters of summary procedure; how many such cases have been referred by the procurator fiscal at Paisley to the Crown Office in each of the past 10 years; what were the reasons and circumstances for these referrals; how many of these involved elected councillors; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what assessment he has made of whether, in relation to the policy and operation of Paisley procurator fiscal's office, any person accused or suspected of any criminal offence was more or less likely to be charged because they held elected office as a councillor; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what assessment he has made of whether all prosecutions conducted by the Paisley procurator fiscal's office since 1984, where the suspect or accused held elected office as a member of a local authority at the time of alleged offence, have been conducted properly and in the same manner as those not holding such office and that the involvement of Strathclyde police in all such cases has been conducted properly, and in the same manner as cases which did not involve the holder of such office; and if he will make a statement.

(7) what assessment he has made of the operation and policy of the procurator fiscal's office in Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is satisfied that the procurator fiscal and his deputes reach decisions, including those relating to cases involving elected councillors, on an impartial basis. Such cases are dealt with on exactly the same basis as reports relating to any other accused persons. The decision whether to take proceedings and the nature of any proceedings will be determined on the basis of the procurator fiscal's assessment of all the relevant circumstances including the public interest. There is no requirement to report summary cases to the Crown Office, although procurators fiscal are free to do so if they wish to seek Crown counsel's advice on any aspect of the case. Procurators fiscal do not keep a record of cases involving councillors or of cases reported to the Crown Office. Accordingly, no information is available as to the number of cases referred to the Crown Office by the procurator fiscal at Paisley.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is aware, however, of three cases, involving elected councillors, reported to the procurator fiscal at Paisley.

In two of these cases criminal proceedings were taken and in one no criminal proceedings were taken. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is satisfied that in each case the decision represented an appropriate exercise of the procurator fiscal's discretion, and that the decisions were arrived at impartially. The effectiveness and efficiency of all procurator fiscal offices is kept under review by the Crown Office through a programme of office reviews. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate does not intend to instruct an independent inquiry into the operation of the Paisley office.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, in how many cases under summary procedure in the last 10 years the procurator fiscal at Paisley has paid for witnesses to be flown to from countries outside the British Isles; how many involved police escorts; what was the cost to the public purse in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many requests for an independent inquiry into the operational efficiency, effectiveness and objective impartiality of the Paisley procurator fiscal's office he has received since 1992 from right hon. and hon. Members; how many similar requests were made of the Lord Advocate by right hon. and hon. Members; if he will list those made by right hon. Members representing constituencies in Renfrewshire; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland nor my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has received any general request from any Member of Parliament for an independent inquiry into the operational efficiency, effectiveness and objective impartiality of the procurator fiscal's office at Paisley. On the other hand, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is aware of three requests for independent inquiries into the handling of particular cases. Two of these requests were made by the hon. Member himself and one was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate does not accept that there is any need for an independent inquiry into the handling of cases by the procurator fiscal's office at Paisley.

Scottish Homes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the chairman of Scottish Homes to discuss bringing the 56 flats in Waverley court, Foxbar, back into habitable use; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend meets the board of Scottish Homes from time to time to discuss a range but he would not normally discuss detailed matters of operation such as this. I shall therefore ask the chairman of Scottish Homes to write to the hon. Member.

Structural Funding

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the contribution of capital costs associated with the redevelopment of Houstoun square, Johnstone, by *(a)* European Community sources, *(b)* central Government sources, *(c)* Renfrewshire Enterprise, *(d)* Strathclyde regional council and *(e)* Renfrew district council.

Mr. Kynoch: The western Scotland objective 2 programme management committee recently approved ERDF funding of £246,000 towards £491,000 of eligible expenditure on the project. The application indicated that Renfrewshire Enterprise is to contribute £95,000 and that Renfrew district council is to contribute £150,000 towards the ERDF-eligible costs. We understand that Renfrew district council is to contribute a further £50,000 in respect of costs which are not eligible for ERDF support. We are not aware of any proposed contribution by Strathclyde regional council or of any application for central Government support. Decisions on the level of support for this project by Renfrewshire Enterprise and Renfrew district council are entirely for these bodies to make.

Flood Prevention Schemes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to impose a statutory duty, rather than a permissive right, on local authorities to submit flood prevention schemes to him for approval and funding assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 already provides that where a regional or islands council wishes to carry out flood prevention operations, other than maintenance or management, these operations must be carried out in accordance with a scheme made by the council and confirmed by the Secretary of State. These arrangements will apply also to the new unitary local authorities. Fifty per cent. Government grant is payable to the authorities concerned on the eligible capital costs of confirmed schemes.

Hospitals, Renfrewshire

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of *(a)* Dykebar hospital, Paisley and *(b)* Elderslie hospital; when he last discussed their future with representatives of Renfrewshire Healthcare trust; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not received a request from Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust for a meeting and there are no current plans for a meeting to be held at a future date.

The Argyll and Clyde health board is committed to developing quality care in the community which in time will lead to increased provision and care support outwith hospital settings.

I understand that the board's draft joint community care plan which covers the period up to 1998 has no specific proposals to close Dykebar hospital.

The future of Elderslie hospital and the reprovision of services was the subject of a detailed public consultation exercise in 1992. It is the health board's intention to close Elderslie hospital once quality replacement community services have been created. Closure will require the consent of the Secretary of State.

Raymond Gilmour

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what stage he has reached in his consideration

of the application for the prerogative of mercy submitted to him by solicitor Gordon Ritchie on behalf of Raymond Gilmour; what assessment he has made of whether it would be appropriate for him to meet the hon. Member for Paisley South, Mr. Ritchie and others prior to his final decision on the case; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Fresh representations were submitted on behalf of Mr. Raymond Gilmour on 12 December 1994 and 1 February this year. These are currently under consideration and the hon. Member will be informed once our inquiries are complete. Any request for a meeting could be considered at that stage.

Correspondence

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes the Lord Advocate proposes to make in respect of the matters dealt with in his letter dated 6th July to the hon. Member for Paisley, South.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has no plans to make changes in respect of any of the matters referred to in his letter.

Red Star Parcel Service

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has made to the Department of Transport and the Treasury over the sale of Red Star parcel service; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I concur with the sale of Red Star and have made no representations.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will specify the quantity and nature of the drugs found in the debris near Lockerbie after the destruction of Pan Am 103.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No significant quantities of drugs were recovered in the course of the Lockerbie investigation. Small "users" quantities of cannabis were found.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what study the Crown Office has made of the "File on Four" investigation of the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie on the evidence against two accused Libyans.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Crown Office officials have considered this programme, as they have other media productions which have come to their attention. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate considers that the appropriate place to test the results of the Lockerbie investigation is in the criminal courts and not on a radio programme.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library copies of the documents dealing with the only direct alleged eye-witness evidence identifying the alleged Libyan agents in Malta, supposedly involved in the destruction of Pan Am 103.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate cannot disclose details of the evidence in the Lockerbie case while criminal proceedings are pending.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Crown Office will place in the Library the report given to representative James Tafficant of Ohio of investigators hired by Pan Am insurance underwriters alleging that the CIA had allowed a man with terrorist connections to transport drugs to the United States in exchange for information about United States hostages in Lebanon.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not in accordance with the policy of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate to arrange for foreign litigation material to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the letter from the senior legal assistant to the Lord Advocate, Mr. A. Dunn, to Mr. Martin Cadman of the Lockerbie Relatives Association concerning the examination by the Crown Office and the Dumfries and Galloway police of the evidence in "Maltese Double Cross".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not the policy of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate to arrange for such correspondence to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the results of the Crown Office examination of the evidence in "Maltese Double Cross".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It would be inappropriate to disclose the results of the examination of a film purporting to investigate the Lockerbie bombing while criminal proceedings are pending.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what communication the Crown Office has had with *Der Spiegel* in relation to Lockerbie, and the information published in *Der Spiegel*, of March 1995, in the article "Lockerbie: War Es Abu Nudal?"

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no communications between Crown Office and *Der Spiegel* in relation to the article "Lockerbie: War Es Abu Nidal?" published in January 1995.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusion the Crown Office adduced from the court award to Air Malta of compensation against Granada Television in relation to its allegations about the role of Malta G.C. in the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crown Office has drawn no conclusions from settlement of a civil litigation which proceeded upon the basis of allegations which are different in detail from those contained within the charges in the petition warrants for the arrest of the two Libyans accused of this crime.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Scottish police have interviewed Maurice Callejas, Commander of the Maltese armed forces in 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what positive identification took place by anyone interviewed by the Scottish police in Malta of Libyan suspects.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate cannot disclose details of the evidence in the Lockerbie case while criminal proceedings are pending.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what dates Scottish police interviewed Dr. David Fieldhouse, Bradford police surgeon, in connection with his work in the Lockerbie area in December 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Dr. Fieldhouse travelled to Lockerbie on a number of occasions in early 1989. He held discussions there with officers of Dumfries and Galloway police concerning his involvement in the identification and examination of Lockerbie victims. These discussions culminated in his submission of a detailed statement to them on 22 April 1989.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Crown Office endorsed the apology given in his written report by Sheriff John Mowat to Dr. David Fieldhouse for overlooking his information about Lockerbie body DCF 12 Male, Hillside NE of Shawhill farm and of the undeserved criticism of his activities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sheriff Principal Mowat QC did not apologise for overlooking information about a body but apologised for criticism which had been made of Dr. Fieldhouse during the fatal accident inquiry relating to the Lockerbie disaster. The Sheriff Principal found in terms that Dr. Fieldhouse had pronounced life extinct in 58 bodies. That accorded with the evidence of the police at the fatal accident inquiry.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to the letter JAD/91 of 9 January from Mr. J. A. Dunn, senior legal assistant at the Crown Office, to Mr. Martin Cadman, father of a victim of Pan Am 103, what new material arising from examination of the film "Maltese Double Cross" has been investigated and subjected to detailed scrutiny.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It would be inappropriate to disclose the results of the examination of a film purporting to investigate the Lockerbie bombing while criminal proceedings are pending.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Crown Office has sought to interview Mr. James Shaughnessy, lawyer for Pan Am, with regard to United States-United Kingdom surveillance of the Iranian embassy in Beirut in the second half of 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if *(a)* the Crown Office and *(b)* the Scottish police have sought to interview Mr. Ali Nuri Zadeh about his reports in the *Al Dustur* newspaper involving Matthew Gannon and Charles McKee, both of whom perished at Lockerbie.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration the Crown Office has given to the advancing age of those witnesses whom the prosecution proposes to lead in court in relation to the Lockerbie case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crown Office has noted the passing of time.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what grounds the Crown Office has for supposing that a criminal trial in relation to Lockerbie can still be anticipated as indicated in the Lord Advocate's letter, CAD/E/MP/286/93.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A trial will take place as and when the Libyans make the two accused available for trial in Scotland or the United States as required by the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the journalist, Alasdair Palmer, is employed in any capacity by Her Majesty's Government.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Alasdair Palmer is not employed in any capacity by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what knowledge he has of body DCF 12 Male, Hillside, NE of Shawhill farm found at Lockerbie by Dr. David Fieldhouse.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At the fatal accident inquiry relating to the Lockerbie disaster, Dr. Fieldhouse gave evidence that there was no record of the body which he had labelled as DCF 12 being found by the police. Dr. Fieldhouse went on to state that the assumption was that there had been human error in recording the location of that body although he considered it to be unlikely that the error could have arisen from his involvement at that particular location. Dr. Fieldhouse went on to state that the suggested locations given by him for bodies did not match up in all cases with the police information. Having considered all the evidence, the Sheriff Principal, in his determination, concluded that Dr. Fieldhouse pronounced life extinct in 58 bodies. That accorded with the evidence of the police at the fatal accident inquiry.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the 18 separate statements that Tony Gavci, clothing shopkeeper of Malta, gave to Scottish police.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate cannot disclose details of evidence while criminal proceedings are pending.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Scottish police have a sworn statement from Her Majesty's Customs Officer Philip Connolly.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether a British Customs officer stationed in Cyprus in 1988 has been questioned by the Scottish police about controlled drug deliveries.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the evidence presented to the Crown Office following the presentation of the petition charging named Libyan individuals to the sheriff of Dumfries was regarded by them at the time as being sufficient for them to conclude their investigations; and on what date they deemed their investigations to be concluded.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The evidence presented to the prosecuting authorities by the police was sufficient to enable the procurator fiscal to request petition warrants for the arrest of the two named accused from the sheriff at Dumfries. As has always been made clear, the investigation remains open.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what directions or instructions to investigate recent allegations of Iranian and Syrian involvement in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103, the Crown Office has given the Dumfries and Galloway police in relation to the directions and instructions of the procurator fiscal.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear, in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Dumfries and Galloway police have interviewed *(a)* officials of the United States embassy who were in Nicosia in 1988 to determine what they knew of events leading up to the Lockerbie disaster and *(b)* the 1988 CIA station chief in Nicosia and the Drugs Enforcement Agency country attache.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear, in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration the Crown Office has given to its legal duty in law to consider and investigate any evidence which tends to exculpate the two libyans accused of the Lockerbie crime; and if the Crown Office is complying with this legal obligation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crown Office considers all relevant evidence and carries out such investigations as are appropriate and will continue to do so in the exercise of its duties.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what inquiries the Crown Office have made of Mr. Larry Robinson, of the United States embassy in London, on the issue of persons, in addition to two Libyans, being involved in the Lockerbie crime.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear, in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much in *(a)* US dollars *(b)* pounds sterling and *(c)* other currencies was collected from the scene of the Lockerbie disaster in December 1988, other than the normal personal money of passengers and crew members of the aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No amounts of money, other than what might ordinarily be regarded as personal money, were found at the Lockerbie crash site. A cashed cheque and substantial quantities of encashed travellers cheques were recovered.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusions the Crown Office has drawn from evidence presented in the court at Karlsruhe in relation to the Lockerbie bombing on 26 April 1989 as to the source of the radios; and what state of preparation they were in when bought.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate cannot disclose details of evidence while criminal proceedings are pending.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Dumfries and Galloway police were present throughout the interview with Mr. Ghadanfar in Frankfurt on 26 October 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Dumfries and Galloway constabulary had no interest in Mr. Ghadanfar in October 1988. It will be recalled that the Lockerbie bombing did not take place until 21 December 1988.

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what instructions or directions to investigate allegations of involvement of countries other than Libya, in the destruction of Pan Am 103, the Crown Office has given the Dumfries and Galloway police in relation to the instructions and directions of the procurator fiscal.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear, in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details investigative steps which have been taken.

Fatal Accident Inquiries

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths of hospital patients have led to fatal accident inquiries being held in *(a)* Renfrewshire, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland in each of the past 10 years; of these, how many were concerned with an inquiry into the death of a patient during or following surgical care; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Procurators Fiscal

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance, assistance or training is given to procurators fiscal to enable them to examine the question both death certificates and medical notes concerning hospital patients who have died either during surgical care or following such treatment; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A significant proportion of procurators fiscal will have studied forensic medicine at university. On joining the procurator fiscal service, they will receive training in relation to the procurator fiscal's role in the investigation of sudden, suspicious or unexplained deaths. In 1992–93 the Crown Office reached agreement with the departments of forensic medicine of the universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen for the departments to

take an active part in the initial and in-service training of procurators fiscal through courses organised both locally and nationally. In addition, the four departments of forensic medicine are under contract to provide procurators fiscal with an advisory consultative service on medical matters. The Departments will also assist procurators fiscal in the interpretation of medical records including the records of persons who have died in hospital or following treatment in hospital.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if a procurator fiscal can issue a requirement to examine medical notes concerning a patient who has died *(a)* during surgery care or *(b)* following surgical care; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A procurator fiscal may apply to the sheriff court for a warrant to recover hospital records. In practice such records are made available on request.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if death certificates are sent by medical practitioners, to procurators fiscal, as *(a)* a matter of course or *(b)* as a legal requirement, following the deaths of hospital patients (i) during surgical care or (ii) following surgical care; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is the duty of the procurator fiscal to inquire into all sudden, suspicious, accidental, unexpected and unexplained deaths, including certain deaths associated with the provision of medical care. Instructions have been given to hospitals, nursing homes and general practitioners, that where a patient has died in certain circumstances, the procurator fiscal must be informed without delay. The responsibility for notification lies with the doctor concerned with the care of the patient or the doctor called in at the time of death. There is no requirement on medical practitioners to send a death certificate to the procurator fiscal. However, arrangements have been made between the Registrar General for Scotland and the Crown Office whereby district registrars will report to the procurator fiscal deaths falling into the categories of deaths into which procurators fiscal must inquire. The registrar will bring such deaths to the attention of the procurator fiscal by sending him an intimation of the particulars relating to the deceased. The intimation will include details of the cause of death as disclosed by the medical certificate.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South, (Mr. Robertson) of 15 February, *Official Report,* column *697,* on provision for children's evidence, if the closed circuit television equipment currently being installed in the Sheriff court, Greenock, is to be a permanent fixture in relation to the taking of evidence from vulnerable witnesses; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 30 September 1991, equipment has been available in the sheriffdoms of Glasgow and Strathkelvin and Lothian and borders to enable child witnesses only, in appropriate cases, to give evidence in criminal trials by way of live television link. The equipment being installed at Greenock sheriff court will be available for cases transferred from other courts in the sheriffdom of north Strathclyde. Provision in that sheriffdom to enable child witnesses to give evidence in criminal trials by closed circuit television will be reviewed no later than 1997, at which time it is expected that major building works at Paisley sheriff court will have been completed.

Secular Buildings

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money Historic Scotland is providing for the renovation and conservation of listed secular buildings in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in the current financial year.

Sir Hector Monro: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Historic Scotland. I have asked its director and chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graeme N. Munro to Dr. Godman, dated 6 March 1995:

You have tabled a Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Scotland for Written Answer on 6 March.

The question relates to operational matters undertaken by Historic Scotland and I have been asked to provide the information you are seeking. The terms of this letter will be reproduced in the Official Report and a copy of it will also be deposited in the Library of the House.

You have asked how much money Historic Scotland is providing for the renovation and conservation of listed secular buildings in *(a)* Inverclyde *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in the current financial year.

The total commitment in the current financial year (that is, payments already made and payments in the pipeline which will be effected prior to 31 March 1995) on historic buildings repair grants for secular buildings in the current financial year is as follows:

(a) Inverclyde: £103,490

(b) Strathclyde: £5,028,850

(c) Scotland: £9,576,000

I hope this information is helpful.

Taxis (Wheelchair Access)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to ensure that newly licensed taxis and private hire vehicles are wheelchair accessible; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: The Government's response on 22 February to the recommendations contained in the report of the Transport Select Committee—Cm 2715—expressed support for the phasing in of the requirement that taxis should be accessible to wheelchair users. Legislation in Scotland relating to taxis and private hire cars is contained in the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. We are now considering in the context of Scottish legislation and circumstances how best to proceed in this matter.

Rail Services

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given to the rail regulator on the need for formal consultation, prior to the withdrawal of any Anglo-Scottish rail services.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* None. The duties of the rail regulator, including the duty to protect rail users' interests, are defined in statute.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the speech of the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) in the Scottish Grand Committee, concerning

consultation on proposed withdrawal of rail services, represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Yes.

Mr. John Robertson

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public positions to which he has appointed Mr. John Robertson of the S. and J. D. Robertson Group, stating in each case the salary and expenses, the required weekly commitment of working days and Mr. Robertson's particular qualifications for the appointment.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* I have appointed Mr. Robertson to the following positions:

Organisation	*Position*	*Salary*	*Weekly time commitment*
Highland Health Board	Chairman	£14,835 pa	2-3 days
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Member	£ 7,410 pa	0.5 days

In addition to salary, Mr. Robertson is re-imbursed any expenses incurred in connection with these appointments at the rate appropriate to the body concerned. Mr. Robertson's appointment as chairman of Highland health board extends until 31 March 1999 and his appointment as a member of Highlands and Islands Enterprise until 30 September 1995. Mr. Robertson has said that he does not wish to be considered for re-appointment to Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Since 27 August 1990 Mr. Robertson has been a lay member of the national health service tribunal. This position carries no remunerative time and travelling expenses incurred in connection with the work of the tribunal. However, the tribunal has not met since Mr. Robertson's appointment.

On 6 February I announced Mr. Robertson's appointment as a chairman of the North of Scotland Water Authority. He will take up these duties later this year and they will entail an average time commitment of two and a half days per week for which he will received £40,000 per annum plus expenses. The appointment will be for four years. When he agreed to accept this appointment, Mr. Robertson told my officials that, on taking up the post, he wished to forgo the payments for his public service with the health board and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This is in line with the action he took for several years with Orkney health board.

Mr. Robertson has a range of skills and experience built up through many years of public service and through running a property and oil distribution business. His links in the highlands and islands have made him particularly suitable for the appointments he has held and should also prove invaluable in connection with his forthcoming role as chairman of the North of Scotland Water Authority.

North of Scotland Electricity Users Consultative Committee

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the appointment of a chairman for the north of Scotland electricity users consultative committee; and what criteria he will apply in making his decision.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Responsibility for the appointment of chairmen of the electricity consumers' committees lies with the Director General of Electricity Supply after consultation with the Secretary of State. It is understood that the director general intends to appoint a new chairman of the north of Scotland consumers' committee in late March.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 7 March 1995

HEALTH

Termination Payments

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what termination payments have been made to *(a)* chairs and *(b)* non-executive directors of NHS authorities and trusts; and in what circumstances such payments are made.

Mr. Malone: No such payments have been made since the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on 16 February 1993, column *164*. Such payments may be made to the chairman of a national health service authority in exceptional circumstances by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. No such provision exists for non-executive members of authorities or for chairmen or non-executive members of NHS trusts.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the procedures adopted in relation to in-contract settlements for former NHS trust chief executives.

Mr. Malone: The Department has issued guidance—TEL(94)3—which sets out what is expected of national health service trusts in providing for contractual termination settlements in respect of chief executives and senior managers.

NHS Treatment of Prisoners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what different arrangements exist for the billing and funding of the outside treatment of prisoners with *(a)* mental illness and *(b)* physical illness;

(2) what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the purchaser-provider split between health authorities in respect of patients who are imprisoned; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Responsibility for meeting the costs of treatment provided to prisoners in national health service accident and emergency units is met by the district in which the hospital is located. Otherwise responsibility for outside treatment falls to the health authority in the prisoner's usual district of residence, determined by the address at which they were resident immediately before detention. Where that cannot be determined satisfactorily, responsibility falls to the district in which the offence, or alleged offence, in respect of which the prisoner is detained was committed. There is no difference between the arrangements for funding treatment of mental and physical illness.

Purchasing authorities are required in their strategic and development plans to take account of the health care needs of all those who are normally resident in their district. This will include the needs of people who are in prison and who may require care and treatment in the NHS. These arrangements are subject to the normal monitoring process undertaken by the NHS Executive.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision the NHS provides for those prisoners suffering from mental illness too severe to be dealt with in prison but not severe enough to warrant incarceration in a Rampton-level unit.

Mr. Bowis: Prisoners who are transferred to national health service hospitals under provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 may be admitted to general psychiatric hospitals, specialist medium-secure units, or one of the three special hospitals. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will name the hospital on a transfer direction following recommendations made to him by two medical practitioners who will have assessed the prisoner and advised on the level of security required.

Health Care, Burton on Trent

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the improvements to health care provision in Burton on Trent and district since the introduction of the health reforms in 1991.

Mr. Sackville: I am aware of the excellent performance by national health service hospitals within the Burton on Trent area and I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend will wish to join me in congratulating them on their successes since the reforms were introduced in 1991. These include:

Burton Hospitals NHS Trust being awarded the charter mark in October 1994 by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

12 new consultants employed at Burton Hospital NHS Trust, an increase of over 25 per cent., all funded from internally generated savings.

In 1992 Premier Health NHS Trust opened a 10 place day unit for the mentally ill, the Horace Pritchard Home, in a joint project with social services.

Burton Fundholding Group set up: fourth wave consortium of 13 practices in nine funds representing 85,000 patients in the Burton area. Total budget £14.5 million.

Burton Hospitals NHS Trust continues to reduce waiting list. At the end of January 56 patients were waiting over nine months. This is expected to be nil by March.

In April Premier Health NHS Trust are expecting to open the £700,000 Margaret Stanhope Centre on the Burton district hospital site to replace the old Harry Jones in-patient psychiatric unit and Belvedere resource centre.

AIDS

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the item concerned with fostering a climate of understanding and compassion, discouraging discrimination and safeguarding confidentiality, as set out in section D.14 of "The Health of the Nation", 1992, has been dropped from the review of "The Health of the Nation"—"One Year On", 1993; and what policy changes underlie this change.

Mr. Sackville: When the AIDS epidemic began in the United Kingdom, the Government dedicated considerable efforts to combating discrimination, not least through the general anti-discrimination legislation. The UK's record is well respected internationally on this. From the London declaration of 1988 to the Paris summit of 1994, the Government have re-emphasised their continuing commitment to discouraging discrimination on this front.

That still underlies each element of the strategy which covers prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, monitoring surveillance and research, and international action.

Health and Inequality

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation she has made of the report published by the department of social policy at the university of Newcastle on "Health and Inequality: the Northern Region 1981 to 1991".

Mr. Sackville: The issues raised in the report are under consideration by the Chief Medical Officer's sub-group looking at variations in health. The group is due to report in spring 1995 on how the Department of Health and the national health service can effectively tackle ethnic, geographical, socio-economic and gender variations in health in the five "Health of the Nation" key areas. Work is progressing in line with that timetable.

Family Networks

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what non-governmental agencies supporting family networks are funded by the Government; and what initiatives they are undertaking.

Mr. Bowis: The Government grant-aid the following voluntary organisations who support family networks:

Barnardos';
The Childrens Society;
Contact a Family;
Exploring Parenthood;
Family Centre Network;
Family Rights Group;
Family Support Network;
Family Services Units;
Family Welfare Association;
Gingerbread;
Grandparents Federation;
National Children's Homes Action For Children;
National Council for One Parent Families;
Parent Line;
Parent Link;
Parent Network;
Parents At Work;
Pre-school Learning Alliance
Save the Children Fund;
The National Stepfamily Association.

These organisations support self-help networks of families or parents, networks of family centres providing services to families and networks of research into family support. The Department of Health spends about £5 million annually supporting these and other family organisations which are not explicitly networks.

"Take Our Daughters to Work"

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support *(a)* she and *(b)* the NHS is giving to "Take our Daughters to Work" campaign on 27 April.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is participating in the "Take our Daughters to Work" campaign. She will be accompanied by a schoolgirl from her constituency on 27 April. As the largest employer of women in Europe, with good examples of women working successfully at all levels of the organisation, this initiative offers an opportunity positively to promote careers in the national health service to potential future employees and a number of NHS authorities and trust have indicated their support for the campaign.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died from solvent and volatile substance abuse in each year since 1985.

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table:

Years	*Deaths*
1985	117
1986	102
1987	115
1988	137
1989	113
1990	151
1991	122
1992	79

Prescriptions

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the categories of illnesses currently exempt from prescription costs.

Mr. Malone: People are exempt from national health service prescription charges if they hold a valid exemption certificate issued by a family health services authority on the grounds that they have one or more of the following medical conditions–

Permanent fistula, including caecostomy, colostomy, laryngostomy, ileostomy or urostomy, requiring continuous surgical dressings or an appliance;
Forms of hypoadrenalism, including Addison's disease, for which specific substitution therapy is essential;
Diabetes insipidus and other forms of hypopituitarism;
Diabetes mellitus except where treatment is by diet alone;
Hypoparathyroidism;
Myasthenia gravis;
Myxoedema, or other conditions where supplemental thyroid hormone is necessary;
Epilepsy requiring continuous anti-convulsive therapy;
A continuing physical disability which prevents the patient from leaving home except with the help of another person.

Occupational Asthma

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate her Department has made of the cost to her Department of the treatment of occupational asthma for each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: None. The Department's information does not distinguish between types of asthma.

Basildon and Thurrock NHS Trust

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she received a copy of the letter from the medical director of the Basildon and Thurrock Hospital trust to all general practitioners, dated 7 February 1995, on difficulties experienced by hospitals recruiting doctors of SHO grade to staff accident and emergency departments; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not received a copy of such a letter.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the establishment of the accident and emergency department at Basildon hospital; and which of these posts are vacant.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Ian MacPherson, chairman of the Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals National Health Service trust, for details.

Hospital Closures

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what mechanism there is within her Department centrally to collate information regarding the number of hospitals and accident and emergency departments that have been closed;

(2) how many planned closures of accident and emergency units have been rejected by community health councils since 1991; and if she will list those that have subsequently not been put into effect;

(3) how many hospital closures in England have taken place following objection to a proposed closure from a community health council since January 1993;

(4) what information is provided to her Department by district health authorities, trusts, regional health authorities and the national health service executive on accident and emergency department closures;

(5) how many accident and emergency departments are currently threatened with closure;

(6) if she will list the hospitals or trusts in respect of which she has been formally consulted about partial or complete closure in the last two years.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not routinely collect information on hospital or accident and emergency department closures. Information is available centrally on proposals to close, or change the use of, health service facilities which are referred to Ministers for decision following objections from a community health council. A list of such proposed closures referred to Ministers in the period 1992–94 will be placed in the Library.

Capital Projects

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the capital projects in the NHS with a works cost of over £1 million that have been completed since 1992 giving a brief description of each project.

Mr. Sackville: Information will be placed in the Library recording National Health Service capital building works projects with a works cost of over £1 million which have been completed since 1992.

Formby Health Authority

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement clarifying the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Dr. McMinn from the chairmanship of Formby health authority.

Mr. Malone: The reason given to Sir Donald Wilson, chairman of North West regional health authority, by Dr. Alex McMinn for resigning as chairman of the Southport and Formby National Health Service trust was increased pressure of business commitments.

Juice Plus

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *497*, if either of the two letters promoting Juice Plus were sent by hon. Members; and if any of the correspondence with officials at the Medicines Control Agency came from hon. Members.

Mr. Sackville: No.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Members of Parliament

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General if the status of a victim of crime as a Member of Parliament is treated as a public interest consideration in deciding whether to bring a prosecution against the alleged offender.

The Attorney-General: Whether the fact that a victim of crime is a Member of Parliament bears upon the public interest in prosecution of the alleged offender in any particular case will depend upon all the circumstances of that case. The Crown Prosecution Service may have in mind among other factors the matters in paragraph 6.4 of the code for Crown prosecutors—namely, whether the offence was committed against a person serving the public, or whether it was motivated by any form of discrimination against the victim's political views.

TREASURY

Manufacturing Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the change in the real exchange rate measured in terms of relative export unit values for manufacturing against the deutschmark since the lowest day's average in February 1993;

(2) in what periods since 1975 British manufactures have been less competitive on price against those of the EEC than in the second quarter of 1994.

Mr. Nelson: Sterling exchange rates against the currencies of the EU can be found in "Financial Statistics", published monthly by the Central Statistical Office. Unit value export prices of goods for these countries can be found in "International Financial Statistics", published monthly by the International Monetary Fund. Unit value export prices of manufactures for the main manufacturing countries, which excludes some of the EU, can be found in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", published monthly by the Central Statistical Office. Data on unit value export prices of manufactures for all EU countries are not readily available.

Together, these data can be used to calculate changes over time in relative export prices for goods against Germany and all other EU countries, and relative export prices for manufactures against some EU countries, including Germany.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that the Bank of

England will not intervene in the foreign exchanges to prevent the pound sterling from falling against the deutschmark.

Mr. Nelson: The valuation of the pound is determined by transactions in the foreign exchange market. Movements in the exchange rate are considered as part of the general assessment of monetary conditions in setting monetary policy. The Government recognise the value of a stable exchange rate, but they do not set target rates. For good reasons of market management, the Government do not comment on intervention in foreign exchange markets.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect of the Government's exchange rate policies on the rate of unemployment since 1975.

Mr. Nelson: Levels of unemployment are influenced by a wide range of factors and it is not possible to isolate the effects of any single factor. The Government's policies are designed to promote sustained economic growth, secure jobs and rising prosperity, through structural policies to improve the long-term performance of the economy and a stable macroeconomic environment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why the nominal rate of exchange rose against the deutschmark between February 1993 and January 1994; what was the effect on the real exchange rate measured in terms of export unit values for manufactures; and what was the effect on the convergence criteria under Maastricht.

Mr. Nelson: The sterling-deutschmark exchange rate is determined by transactions in the foreign exchange markets. Data on the nominal exchange rate can be found in "Financial Statistics" published by the Central Statistical Office. Unit value export prices for the UK and Germany can be found in "International Financial Statistics" published monthly by the International Monetary Fund. Together, these data can be used to calculate the change in the real exchange rate with Germany between January 1993 and February 1994. It is impossible to quantify the effect on the change in the exchange rate on sterling export prices, and hence on to the real exchange rate. Movements in the sterling-deutschmark exchange rate over this period have no direct consequences for the Maastricht convergence criteria.

Inflation and Growth

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for relaxing his inflation targets to allow a faster rate of growth; and what is his estimate of the growth rate for 1995 and 1996 compatible with an inflation target of 2.5 per cent. by the end of this Parliament.

Mr. Nelson: Permanently low inflation is the best way to ensure healthy growth in the economy. The Government's inflation target is designed to achieve this, and is set out in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96", together with forecasts for output and inflation.

Retail Depositors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, as a condition of the guarantee given to retail depositors, the Government will require the high street banks and other financial institutions to hive off their retail operators in such a way that they cannot be affected financially by liabilities incurred in other parts of the enterprise as at present constituted as a condition of the guarantee given to retail depositors.

Mr. Nelson: The Government do not give a guarantee to depositors. The statutory deposit protection scheme, which is financed by the banks themselves, is to compensate depositors in the event of their bank failing. The arrangements governing the supervision of banks are set out elsewhere in the Banking Act 1987.

Financial Participation Schemes

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to proceed with his proposal to make it obligatory for part-time directors as well as part-time employees to be included in tax-relieved employee financial participation schemes, included approved executive share option schemes.

Sir George Young: No. After further consideration, and in the light of representations from institutional investors, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury proposes to introduce amendments at Report stage of the Finance Bill to ensure that the new provisions about the inclusion of part-time workers in tax-relieved employee financial participation schemes will apply only to part-time employees and not to part-time directors.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what overseas visits he or his Ministers have made since 1 July 1994; and what was the duration and cost of such visits and the organisations and groups that were met during the course of such visits.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The overseas visits made since 1 July 1994 by Treasury Ministers, and the duration and cost of such visits and the organisations and groups that were met during the course of such visits, are as follows:

Destination	*Duration*	*Cost (£)*	*Organisations/groups met*
Chancellor of the Exchequer	*1994*		
Naples	8–10 July	3,316	G7 Summit. Finance Ministers
Brussels	11 July	1,726	ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers
Brussels	27 July	1,844	ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers
Germany	9–11 September	2,172	Informal ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers
Malta	26–28 September	1,316	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Mtg.
Madrid	28–30 September	3,087	Bretton Woods Conference. Ministers and Businessmen
Madrid	1–5 October	2,910	G7/IMF Meetings with Ministers
Luxembourg	10 October	2,782	ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers
Brussels	21 October	985	ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers

Destination	Duration	Cost (£)	Organisations/groups met
Brussels	7 November	1,475	ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers
Chateaudun	18 November	1,325	Anglo-French Summit
Brussels	4–5 December	1,383	ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers
Essen	9–10 December	4,261	European Council
Malaysia	30 December 1994–January 1995		Official Tour. Ministers and Businessmen
	1995	[1]15,000	
Thailand	5–10 January		Official Tour. Ministers and Businessmen
Vietnam	10–12 January		Official Tour. Ministers and Businessmen
Brussels	16 January	—[2]	ECOFIN. EU Finance Ministers
Davos	26–29 January		World Economic Forum. Ministers and Businessmen
Brussels	24–25 July 1994	838	Summer Budget Council Meeting
Brussels	15–16 November 1994	838	Winter Budget Council Meeting
Minister of State			
South Africa	18–23 September 1994	5,701	Various Businessmen
Dubai	23–25 October 1994	143	Various Businessmen
New York/Boston	3–6 January 1995	4,405	Various Businessmen

[1] Estimate.
[2] Full details not yet available.

Balance of Payments Deficit

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to the United Kingdom economy of financing the deficit in the current account of the balance of payments since 1986; and if it is the Government's policy to move the current account back into surplus to enable the debt to be repaid.

Mr. Nelson: Figures for the current and capital accounts of the UK's balance of payments are published by the Central Statistical Office annually in the Pink Book, with quarterly data available on the CSO database. Both are available through the Library of the House. Latest figures for the third quarter 1994 show the current account in surplus, with net investment income at record levels and the UK a net creditor. The key to maintaining this good performance is for the Government to deliver permanently low inflation and companies to keep costs under control, thereby ensuring that British industry remains competitive.

TRANSPORT

Light Dues

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on light dues.

Mr. Norris: I am pleased to announce that light dues for 1995–96 will be frozen at the levels set in April 1993 for a second year in succession. I have decided to remove the supplementary roll-on/roll-off charge levied on tonnage in excess of 1,000 tonnes for any vessel whose liability is assessed by an international tonnage convention 1969 certificate. The surcharge will remain for any vessel unable for any reason to offer such a certificate. I have concluded that all other rates should remain unchanged.

I commend the general lighthouse authorities on their continuing achievement of efficiency savings.

Fuel Duty

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of a rise in fuel duty of 5 per cent. per year above the rate of inflation on car use and congestion.

Mr. Norris: The strategy to raise fuel duty by a minimum of 5 per cent. per annum is an important part of the Government's climate change programme to reduce the UK's carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

The forecast for the growth rate of traffic up to 2000 with these increases is much the same as in the Department's current national road traffic forecasts. This reflects the fact that the real price of fuel assumed in those forecasts is similar to that now expected, as the duty increase is offset to a large degree by a lower forecast for real oil prices.

The responsiveness of road use to fuel prices is believed to be low. As well as adjusting the mileage that they drive, road users have the choice of buying smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles, and manufacturers have an incentive to supply them.

North London Line

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the effect of the postponement of the North London line modernisation project on the introduction, or operation, of passenger and freight trains from France for destinations north of London.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack advises me that there has been no postponement of work on the North London line which would affect channel tunnel services.

Railtrack is currently carrying out a study to determine which of several route options through north London will be adopted for channel tunnel services north of London.

Diesel Train Emissions

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what monitoring has taken place of emissions from diesel trains.

Mr. Watts: Under section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, it is the duty of district councils and London borough councils to inspect their areas from time to time to detect any statutory nuisances, including emissions from railway engines but excluding steam locomotives.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to curb emissions from railway diesel engines.

Mr. Watts: It is a condition of the train operator's licence to produce an environmental policy, taking account of guidance from the rail regulator which I understand is in preparation. British Rail takes active steps to control exhaust emissions in sensitive locations. In some terminal stations and depots, provision of shore-based electrical supplies has greatly reduced the need for engines to idle. For new trains, better fuel consumption control has been incorporated in design specifications, together with automatic engine shut-off after a predetermined period.

Concessionary Fares (Epileptics)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the local authorities in the United Kingdom which include people with epilepsy who cannot drive for medical reasons within their concessionary fare schemes.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not held centrally.

Urban Congestion

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his Department has given to measures to decrease the current level of use of private motor vehicles in cities and conurbations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Local authorities are already able to introduce a wide range of measures to reduce urban congestion which they can tailor to the particular circumstances of their areas: for example, traffic management schemes, bus priority lanes, park-and-ride schemes and parking controls, all of which are the subject of departmental advice notes.

Two years ago, we introduced the "package approach" under which local authorities, individually or collectively, can obtain funding for strategic transport plans which encompass all forms of transport. Local authorities are now invited to bid for Government funds on the basis of multi-modal transport packages which take a strategic overview of transport needs and look beyond road-based options.

Planning policy guidance note No. 13, published jointly by the Departments of the Environment and of Transport, offers advice on the role which transport and land use planning policies can jointly play in reducing the need to travel.

Radioactive Fallout, Dounreay

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in full the results of the UK Atomic Energy Authority investigation into the radioactive fallout at Dounreay on 11 February; what assessment he has made of the effect of weather conditions on the level of risk; how far away any safety official was when exposed to radioactivity above the safe working level; whether any person sent to the contamination area wore respirators instead of sealed protective clothing; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The incident is being investigated urgently. In line with normal practice, I understand that a report on the incident will be published in the Health and Safety Executive's quarterly statement of nuclear incidents at nuclear installations.

The waste disposal authorisations granted to the Atomic Energy Authority under the Radioactive Substances Acts include limits designed to protect the public no matter what the weather conditions prevailing at the time of a discharge. Inspectors from HM industrial pollution inspectorate have carried out their initial inquiries into the circumstances leading to the incident and I understand that they are satisfied that it did not cause any of the permitted atmospheric emission limits to be exceeded.

Investigation of workers' exposure issues lies with HM nuclear installations inspectorate. Its investigation will include such issues as whether the radiation exposure of individuals exceeded relevant limits and whether appropriate personnel protection was provided.

Sponsorship of the UKAEA is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the blow-out of radioactive dust at the Dounreay reprocessing plant in February.

Mr. Kynoch: On 11 February 1995, at the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Dounreay site, a process plant was shut down and evacuated because of abnormal concentration of radioactivity in working areas within the plant. A formal investigation has been carried out by the UKAEA. The incident is being investigated by the nuclear inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive and HM industrial pollution inspectorate.

Nuclear Waste, Torness

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Scottish Nuclear of all aspects of the proposal to construct a dry store for waste nuclear fuel at Torness; and if he will give separately the figures for (i) the cost of designing the proposed installation and (ii) the public inquiry into the proposal.

Mr. Kynoch: The cost to the Scottish Office of arranging and conducting the public inquiry into the application by Scottish Nuclear Ltd. to construct a dry store at Torness was approximately £28,700. The cost to the company of the dry store project, including participation in the public inquiry, is a commercial matter for Scottish Nuclear.

Natural Disasters

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1986 is applied in practice in Scotland; what further scope he has to take further action under the section; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: Section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 allows the Secretary of State to establish a scheme to give, with Treasury consent, financial assistance to one or more local authorities which

have incurred expenditure in respect of immediate action to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience, arising from an emergency or disaster which involves destruction of or danger to life or property.

The main application of section 155 in Scotland has been the Bellwin scheme, under which grant is payable at the rate of 85 per cent. on current expenditure above a set threshold incurred by local authorities in responding to natural emergencies.

Nature Reserve Agreement

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what reasons the management arrangement with Farquharson of Invercauld concerning Cairn Lochan estate fell into abeyance in 1986.

Sir Hector Monro: Negotiations took place between the Nature Conservancy Council and the estate about renewal of the nature reserve agreement which expired in 1986, but renewal could not be agreed. Details of negotiations are a private matter between the two parties involved.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each management arrangement in relation to national nature reserves, the person with whom the arrangement is made, the period of the arrangement and the cost.

Sir Hector Monro: The question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Pay Awards

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the cost to his Department's budget and to local authorities' self-financed expenditure in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of *(a)* the School Teachers' Review Body, *(b)* the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration and *(c)* the Review Body on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, assuming no changes in staff numbers.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* The School Teachers' Review Body is responsible only for teachers in England and Wales. Statutory responsibility for determination of pay and conditions of service for teachers in Scotland lies with the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee. The Government have accepted the recommendations of the Review Bodies on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration and on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine. The 1995–96 settlement for the NHS in Scotland provides for a cash increase of £143.2 million, or 3.6 per cent. increase. The cost of pay increases will be dependent on the outcome of negotiations at local level.

Hospital External Audits

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many external audits carried out upon hospitals by the Royal College of Surgeons or a similar body in *(a)* Renfrewshire, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past 10 years have led to disciplinary measures being taken by him; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many external audits have been carried out under the auspices of the Royal College of Surgeons or some similar body, upon hospitals in *(a)* Renfrewshire, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland in the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The Secretary of State is not aware of any external clinical audits carried out under the auspices of the Royal College of Surgeons or a similar body in hospitals in Renfrewshire, Strathclyde or Scotland in the past 10 years. Clinical audit is an education process and there is quite a separate and distinct machinery for disciplinary procedures which are a matter for employing authorities. The Medical Royal Colleges carry out accreditation inspections of hospitals but these are solely for the purpose of approving training posts.

School Examinations

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his letter of 27 February to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, *(a)* what proposals he has to make changes in the system of written work in relation to physical education examinations in schools and *(b)* what factors led him to reject the explanation put forward in relation to the two pupils accused of cheating from a school named in correspondence with the hon. Member for Linlithgow.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The Scottish Examination Board keeps all its assessment arrangements under review and has decided that revised procedures will be in place for written work in standard grade physical education assignments for 1996 onwards.

Responsibility for decisions in relation to assessment for awards under the Scottish Certificate of Education rests with the Scottish Examination Board, which carried out a thorough review of the case in question.

Ayrshire Child Abuse Case

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cumulative cost of all legal aid to date to the families in the Ayrshire child abuse case; what is his estimate of the likely total cost; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Six legal aid certificates have been granted in respect of this case. Payments to date amount to £538,000. The total costs may be subject to scrutiny by the Auditor of Court and cannot yet be accurately assessed. The Scottish Legal Aid Board has, however, estimated that they may fall in the range £1.5 million to £2 million.

Caledonian MacBrayne

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amount of revenue deficit grant he proposes to make available to Caledonian MacBrayne in 1995–96.

Mr. Lang: Subject to approval of the estimates, I propose to make available to Caledonian MacBrayne in 1995–96 revenue deficit grant amount to £8.3 million.

The proposed amount reflects an increased requirement for grant compared with the 1994–95 level and takes into account the effect of the proposed closure of the company's Kyle of Lochalsh-Kyleakin service when the Skye bridge opens later in 1995. the costs associated with

the introduction, also later in 1995, of a major new vessel on the Ullapool to Stornoway service and the costs of compliance with additional safety requirements on vessels.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 March.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 March 1995.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Innovation and Technology Transfer

Mr. Heald: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made with the review announced in the White Paper, "Scotland in Union", of the scope for transferring from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Scottish and Welsh Offices responsibility for measures which encourage industrial innovation and technology transfer in Scotland and Wales.

The Prime Minister: The review has been completed. It concluded that responsibility for the Smart and Spur schemes, which provide grants for the development of new products and processes and for design services in Scotland and Wales, should be transferred. In addition, it has now been agreed that responsibility for new measures to support innovation locally will be transferred to the Secretary of State for Scotland as soon as the administrative arrangements have been completed.

Civil Servants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will instruct the Civil Service Commissioners to advertise for open competition at the previous rate of remuneration the post of any permanent secretary who wishes to take advantage of the recent pay award.

The Prime Minister: No.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Conference

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if he will be attending the conference on the future of the non-proliferation treaty to be held in New York in April and May.

The Prime Minister: No. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary plans to attend on 18 April.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, columns *580-581*, if he will make a statement as to the grounds on which the charges incurred by individual airlines under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 are treated as commercially confidential.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Administration of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act involves the Home Office in sensitive discussions with individual carriers. These are conducted on a commercial in confidence basis. To disclose the nature of the discussions, including the level of charges, would represent a breach of that confidentiality, and could jeopardise both the carriers' commercial operations, and our own debt recovery programme.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what police records still exist in relation to the security of the Pan Am Clipper, Maid of the Seas, at Heathrow airport on 21 December 1988.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The inquiries conducted by officers of the Metropolitan police concerning the security of the aircraft Maid of the Seas, at Heathrow airport on 21 December 1988 in relation to the Lockerbie case, and the records of those inquiries, form part of the case against the two Libyans who have been accused of this crime. It has been made clear that, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of the evidence while criminal proceedings are pending.

Ethnic Minority Funding

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the section 11 *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful bids showing in the case of the approved figure as a percentage of the bid in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 22 February 1995 *Official Report*, columns *228-32*, in which I set out the level of grant sought by each applicant under the recent section 11 bidding round, and to the reply which my right hon. and learned Friend gave to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) on 28 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *541-45*, in which he listed the grant budget allocation for 1995-96 for each successful applicant. Table *(a)* shows, in respect of each successful applicant, the level of budget allocation for 1995-96 expressed as a percentage of grant sought for that year, all on the basis of November 1994 prices which applicants were asked to use in preparing their bids, and subject in some instances to arithmetical adjustments to correct an applicant's original calculations. Table *(b)* lists those applicants whose bids were unsuccessful.

(a) Successful applicants

Local authorities etc	*Grant awarded as percentage of grant sought*
Avon	96.1
Barking and Dagenham	96.2
Barnet	74.4
Berkshire	51.3
Bexley	40.0
Birmingham	8.9
Bolton	34.8
Bradford	96.0
Brent	19.9
Bromley	63.5

(a) Successful applicants

Local authorities etc	Grant awarded as percentage of grant sought
Buckinghamshire	76.8
Cambridgeshire	13.5
Camden	94.4
Cardiff	33.3
Cleveland	51.4
Coventry	51.6
Croydon	100.0
Derbyshire	39.8
Devon	42.8
Dorset	50.0
Dudley	94.7
Ealing	93.7
East Sussex	74.6
Enfield	74.7
Essex	21.1
Gateshead	94.5
Gloucestershire	80.7
Greenwich	80.2
Gwent	100.0
Hackney	27.4
Hammersmith and Fulham	91.0
Haringey	79.4
Harrow	100.0
Havering	100.0
Hereford and Worcester	100.0
Hertfordshire	100.0
Hillingdon	59.0
Hounslow	66.5
Humberside	13.3
Hyndburn	27.9
Islington	83.6
Kent	100.0
Kirklees	87.9
Lambeth	96.2
Lancashire	47.2
Leeds	13.3
Leicester	57.6
Leicestershire	70.0
Lewisham	69.3
Lincolnshire	100.0
Liverpool	77.1
London Boroughs Grants Committee	100.0
Manchester	100.0
Merton	91.5
Middlesbrough	12.2
Milton Keynes	46.3
Newham	48.2
Norfolk	55.4
Northamptonshire	38.7
Nottingham	70.6
Nottinghamshire	57.9
Oldham	43.6
Oxford	66.6
Peterborough	50.0
Redbridge	67.0
Redditch	100.0
Rochdale	27.8
Rotherham	80.6
Salford	75.8
Sheffield	23.4
Shropshire	71.3
Somerset	83.3
South Tyneside	58.3
South Yorkshire FCDA	100.0
Southampton	18.3
Southwark	74.8
St. Albans	100.0
St. Helens	75.8
Staffordshire	59.1
Suffolk	27.4

(a) Successful applicants

Local authorities etc	Grant awarded as percentage of grant sought
Sutton	56.2
Tameside	7.1
Tower Hamlets	10.0
Wakefield	90.2
Walsall	81.1
Waltham Forest	7.9
Warwickshire	87.3
West Glamorgan	100.0
West Midlands FCDA	100.0
West Yorkshire FCDA	100.0
Westminster	65.4
Wigan	71.3
Wolverhampton	88.6
Grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges	
Ash Green	73.7
Beechview Middle	50.0
Bishop Challoner RC	100.0
Brentside High	60.6
Brushwood Middle	100.0
Castle Hall	83.3
Castlefield	71.3
Claremont	100.0
Copland Community	100.0
Deacon's	83.3
Desborough	50.0
Djanogly CTC	85.7
Dormers Wells Infants	62.9
Dormers Wells Junior	100.0
Drayton Manor	100.0
Dunraven	63.8
Francis Bacon	100.0
Graveney	82.7
Greenford High	73.9
Greenwood Dale	100.0
Hall Green	100.0
Hamilton Combined	100.0
Hendon	75.8
Holly Hall	66.7
Holy Trinty	83.9
John Kelly Girls	100.0
London Oratory	76.7
Myton	100.0
Northampton Boys	90.9
Northolt High	87.5
Prospect	79.3
Queens Park	94.3
Radcliffe	50.0
Reading Girls	76.9
Sacred Heart RC	100.0
Small Heath	98.9
St. Andrews RC	50.0
St. Marks West Essex	100.0
Stantonbury Campus	100.0
Stopsley High	100.0
Stratford	99.9
Surrey Square	100.0
Wood End Infant	100.0
Wood End Junior	66.7
Wrenn	75.8
Colleges of further education	
Arnold and Carlton	78.6
Bexley	100.0
Birmingham Consortium	54.2
Cambridge Regional	100.0
Charles Keene	62.4
City and Islington	58.4
Clarendon	54.5

(a) Successful applicants

Local authorities etc	*Grant awarded as percentage of grant sought*
Coventry Technical	37.5
Crawley	100.0
Croydon	100.0
Ealing Tertiary	32.5
Enfield	100.0
Greenhill	43.9
Hackney Community	80.1
Hendon	100.0
Huddersfield Technical	34.0
Kingsway	28.8
Language and Literacy Unit Southwark	49.5
Newham	35.4
Oaklands	44.3
Park Lane	63.1
Sheffield	47.2
South Nottingham	82.4
Southgate	67.5
St. Francis Xavier	50.0
Tameside	100.0
Thomas Danby	15.3
Tile Hill	100.0
Tower Hamlets	38.3
Uxbridge	22.7
West Herts	65.8

(b) Unsuccessful applicants

Local Authority	
Bedfordshire	Preston
Burnley	Reading
Bury	Richmond
Calderdale	Sandwell
Clwyd	Scunthorpe
Crew and Nantwich	Sefton
Doncaster	South Glamorgan
Gloucester	Sunderland
Hampshire	Surrey
Kensington and Chelsea	Trafford
Kingston	Wansworth
Luton	West Sussex
Newcastle	Wiltshire
North Tyneside	Wirral
Oxfordshire	Woking
Portsmouth	
Grant-maintained schools, City Technology Colleges	
Alperton Common	Kingsbury High
Anglo European	Merrill Community
Avon Valley	Montagu
Beechen Cliff	Notre Dame
Billericay	Oldfield
Blessed Edward Oldcorne RC	Raines Foundation
Broomhill Infant	Reay Primary
Chadwell Heath	Richard Challoner
Dixons CTC	St. Bartholomew's
Durand Primary	St. Benedict's Catholic High
Gordon'	St. Bernadette RC
Hollingwood 1st	St. Martin in Field
Holy Cross Convent	St. Thomas the Apostle
Holywell	The Gilberd
Hopwood Hall	Weavers
Kelsey Park	Woodnewton Junior
Colleges of Further Education	
Amersham and Wycombe	Manchester
Barnet	N E London
Bilborough	Newcastle
Bolton	Newham Sixth Form

(b) Unsuccessful applicants

Local Authority	
Calderdale	North Herts
City College Manchester	Northampton
City of Westminster	Oldham
Dewsbury	People's Tertiary Education
Doncaster	Rotherham
Dudley	Runshaw
East Berkshire	Southwark
Gateshead	Stoke on Trent 6th form
Gateway 6th Form	Stourbridge
Gloscat	Swindon
Henley	Tresham
Huntingdonshire Regional	Wakefield
Joseph Chamberlain	Walsall
Keighley	Wansworth Adult
Kensington and Chelsea	Woolwich
Leyton 6th form	

Protection of Animals Legislation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 19 January from the hon. Member for Ealing, North regarding Government policy towards the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State wrote to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 2 March.

Al Fayed Brothers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many items of correspondence were received from the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) by Ministers in his Department on issues relating to the interests of the Al Fayeds; on what dates they were received; and how many were replied to.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It is not the practice to disclose information about communications between hon. Members and Ministers.

EDUCATION

Administrative Costs

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the total administrative costs of her Department for 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: Total administrative costs, including capital, for the Department in 1993–94 were £88 million. The comparable forecast outturn figures for 1994–95 is £92 million.

Civil Servants

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total number of civil servants employed in her Department in 1993–94; and what is the expected figure for 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: The actual outturn figure for 1993–94 was 2,101 full-time equivalent staff. The estimated figure for 1994–95 is 2,097.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many people were employed in the school curriculum branch of her Department in each year since 1992–93; and what were the total operating costs of the branch in each of those years.

Mr. Boswell: The school curriculum branch of the Department came into existence on 1 April 1994 as part of a wider reorganisation within the Department. For 1994–95 full-time equivalent staff in post are expected to average 81, with estimated running costs of £2.3 million. Because of the reorganisation, it is not possible to give comparable figures for earlier years.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total staff pay bill for her Department for 1993–94 and what is the expected amount for 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: The total staff pay bill for the Department in 1993–94 was £51 million. The comparable forecast outturn figure for 1994–95 is £52 million.

Ofsted School Inspections

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost of Ofsted inspections for *(a)* secondary, *(b)* primary and *(c)* special schools for each group size of school in 1994–95.

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Decommissioning Scheme

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for compensating fishermen who lose their jobs when fishing vessels are decommissioned under his scheme.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *34*.

Milk Hygiene

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which division of his Department is responsible for the implementation of milk hygiene inspection.

Mr. Jack: ADAS, an executive agency of the Ministry and the Welsh Office, is responsible for hygiene inspections on dairy farms in England and Wales. This work is carried out under the terms of a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry's milk and milk products division and the relevant division in the Welsh Office.

Fishermen (Retirement)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will support the Commission's proposal for an early retirement scheme for fishermen at the forthcoming council meeting.

Mr. Jack: No such proposal has yet been made to the Council.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to implement the two-year extension to the deadline for abattoirs to meet EU structural requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The deadline for abattoirs to meet EU structural requirements remains 31 December 1995. The December Agriculture Council agreed in principle a package of amendments to the fresh meat directive which cannot be formally adopted until the European Parliament's opinion has been delivered and considered. That package would confirm the 31 December 1995 deadline, but would allow member states to extend it in exceptional circumstances where plants which are in the process of upgrading cannot complete the work for reasons outside their control. If these provisions are adopted, the Government will therefore consider exercising a small degree of flexibility only in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the capacities for EU certified slaughterhouses in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 16 January 1995 to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), *Official Report*, column *364*.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many abattoirs there were in 1993 and 1994; and how many of these met European Community standards.

Mrs. Browning: All abattoirs are licensed in accordance with the terms of European Community directives laying down the hygiene, operation supervision and structural conditions of abattoirs, so that they all meet European Community standards.

At the end of 1993, there were 433 licensed red meat abattoirs in England of which 60 were fully approved to trade throughout the Community; 187 were full throughput premises with temporary derogations; and 186 were low throughput premises. At the end of 1994, there were 424 licensed red meat abattoirs in England of which 78 were fully approved; 154 had temporary derogations; and 192 were low throughput. Low throughput premises and premises with temporary derogations are approved to trade on the national market.

Quarantine Kennels

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given to permitting the independent inspection of quarantine kennels.

Mrs. Browning: Licensed quarantine kennels, all of which are privately owned, are already inspected quarterly by MAFF veterinary officers. They may be accompanied by another party authorised by them and assisting them in their duties.

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will outline the past and present procedures followed by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down to monitor the continued health of volunteers who have taken part in experiments;

(2) for what period of time the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down continues to monitor the health of volunteers after the end of experiments in which they were involved.

Mr. Soames: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 7 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will outline the past and present procedures followed by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down to monitor the continued health of volunteers who have taken part in experiments and for what period of time Porton Down continues to monitor the health of volunteers after the end of studies in which they were involved, have been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel, and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

The purpose of the volunteer studies programme is to ensure that any protective measure is acceptable from a military point of view and is safe before it is recommended for introduction into service. Such measures need to be evaluated first in the safety of a laboratory or hospital environment, with full medical and scientific back-up at hand.

3. The principles of how volunteer studies are to be conducted are enshrined by international agreement in the Helsinki declaration. Further detailed guidance has been issued by the Royal College of Physicians (London). Volunteer studies at CBDE Porton Down are overseen by an independent panel of experts who form the CBDE Ethics Committee. The role of the Ethics Committee is to ensure the safety of the subjects and to safeguard the scientific staff who carry out the human studies from criticism which may be informed or otherwise. They evaluate each protocol well in advance and only approve a protocol if they are satisfied that there will be no harm to the health of the volunteers. Human studies at CBDE are conducted with volunteers drawn from the three Armed Services, namely from amongst the men and women we seek to protect. The volunteers apply in response to requests officially promulgated months in advance.

4. Before any exposure of volunteers to drugs or other substances takes place, it is explicit duty of the Medical Office (MO) assigned to each study to assess risks, and recommend a study design so as to minimise them. This is done by preparing a detailed protocol which is first scrutinised by an in-house Committee, and finally by the independent CBDE Ethics Committee. Exposure of volunteers where side effects last longer than the one or two weeks stay of the volunteer on site are never acceptable.

5. Service volunteers on arrival at CBDE are first given a medical examination to determine if they are healthy and fit to take part in the study. The study is explained to them in lay terms by a military officer who is not involved in the study and it is made clear to the volunteer that they can withdraw from the study at any stage without any explanation being required. On leaving CBDE on completion of the study the volunteers are given a further medical examination.

6. Service volunteers return to their units on completion of the study, where they are, medically, the responsibility of the unit Medical Officer. There is no history of Service doctors in their units seeking advice from CBDE Porton Down on any subsequent illnesses that may have been reported by volunteers who have been exposed to agent during studies at CBDE.

7. Some volunteers have volunteered to return repeatedly to CBDE for different studies at irregular intervals. In such cases CBDE invariably refer to the volunteer's previous records. These opportunities, which are spontaneous and sporadic, to examine medically the volunteers have shown no evidence of any change to the health of the volunteers as a result of their earlier participation at CBDE, provides assurance that volunteers have not suffered any harm to their health.

8. From time to time after specific studies, those volunteers that participated in them are called back to CBDE for a further set of tests or measurements in order to check on the consistency of the method used in the tests or measurement and to demonstrate its invariance with time. As an example, in one study six volunteers were recalled twice so that the consistency of the method used in a particular study could be checked and in another study seven volunteers were recalled for the same reason. Such recalls can take place as much as one or two years after the original study. In all these cases there was no evidence that the health of the volunteers had changed or been harmed as a result of their participation in the study at CBDE Porton Down.

9. Health checks are carried out regularly on Service personnel and the frequency of such checks is determined by the age of the Serviceman or Servicewoman and if any need has arisen for more regular health review such as diagnosis of some pathological condition such as hypertension. Similarly, postings to military duties requiring a very high standard of physical and mental well-being such as tour of duty in the submarine service will necessitate further medical checks for the individual concerned. In addition, the Service medical records of some part volunteers have been scrutinised from time to time, and the conclusion drawn that their health and sickness record is in no way different from a control group.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many human volunteers have been involved in experiments at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1965; if he will give the number of volunteers for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 7 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many human volunteers have been involved in experiments at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1965; if he will give the number of volunteers for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel, and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The number of Service volunteers who have participated in studies during the period 1965–1994 was about 5,400 and the number in each of the last five years for which figures are available were as follows:

1990: 83
1991: 50
1992: 112
1993: 64
1994: 104

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the type of experiments carried out on human volunteers at Porton Down in the last three years for which information is available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 7 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will outline the type of experiments carried out on human volunteers at Porton Down in the last three years for which information is available, and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

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No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The types of studies which have been carried out over the past three years have been to assess the performance of Service personnel whilst wearing individual protective equipment (IPE), the efficacy and effectiveness of experimental IPE using simulants, and the evaluation of possible side effects on military performance from the administration of improved medical countermeasures.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the rates of payment for volunteers taking part in experiments at Porton Down in each year since 1979.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr Derek Fatchett, dated 7 March 1995:

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a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

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No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Service volunteers receive compensation for the inconvenience associated with individual tests carried out within each study. The number of tests in any study vary between about a minimum of 100 to a maximum of 400 as studies vary between three days to four week in duration.

4. The rates of payment per test over the past five years are as follows:

1990: £1.34
1991: £1.50
1992: £1.60
1993: £1.62
1994: £1.66

The current rate of payment per test is £1.70. The total amount of compensation ranges from about £170 to £500 and is subject to tax.

5. Our records are not maintained in such a way as to easily provide the rates of payment for volunteers who have taken part in studies at Porton Down in each year since 1979 and to seek this information would involve disproportionate effort and cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many deaths have been recorded as a direct result of experiments carried out on volunteers at Porton Down.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 7 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how many deaths have been recorded as a direct result of experiments carried out on volunteers at Porton Down, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel, and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Since the start of the Service Volunteer programme in the 1920s, there has been a single fatality in 1953 as reported in the Official Report (9 June 1953, Volume 516, Col 7-8 and 22 June 1953, Volume 516, Col 105) when Leading Aircraftsman Ronald Maddison died from the effects of asphyxia after taking part in a trial at the then Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment at Porton Down. A detailed inquiry was held into the circumstances and following this inquiry which was carried out by eminent independent scientists, new guidelines were laid down to ensure the safety of Service volunteers. In the subsequent 40 years, there has been no fatality nor has there been any evidence that any Service volunteers have suffered any deterioration in their health as a result of participating in studies at Porton Down.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding people who have suffered ill health subsequent to taking part in experiments at Porton Down in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 7 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what representations he has received regarding people who have suffered ill health subsequent to taking part in experiments at Porton Down in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

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a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel, and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

We have received enquiries from a variety of sources over the past year relating to the studies in which volunteers participated. We have received and responded to 13 Parliamentary Enquiries, 2 enquiries from General Practitioners, 10 from the War Pensions Agency and 9 direct from volunteers.

There is no evidence over the past 40 years to suggest that Service volunteers who have participated in studies at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have suffered any harm to their health. Indeed, some volunteers have volunteered to participate in studies at CBDE on more than one occasion and some have also been recalled so that measurements could be checked. volunteers are medically examined on arrival at CBDE Porton Down and are informed that they may leave the study at any stage without giving any explanation. They are also medically examined at the end of their stay at CBDE Porton Down to ensure that they are fit before they return to their units. In addition, there is no history of service doctors in their units seeking advice from CBDE Porton Down on any subsequent illnesses that may have been reported by volunteers who have been exposed to agent. There is therefore no reason to suggest that volunteers have suffered any harm to their health.

5. The medical records of the Servicemen are provided on request to their General Practitioner as is information from CBDE Porton Down on the studies in which they participated. This information is provided to the medical practitioners as they are best placed to judge if any of the experience throughout the Service career of the individual has any relevance to their current medical conditions.

6. It is important to recognise that the human body is remarkably effective in dealing with toxic pollutants to which we are exposed in our daily lives and the participation in a study at CBDE Porton Down involving a short exposure to chemical warfare agent has to be considered in the context of whole life exposures to other toxic pollutants.

7. Finally, the Ministry of Defence is very grateful to all Service personnel who have served as volunteers in studies at CBDE Porton Down as their participation has been vital to ensuring that the members of the UK Armed Forces are provided with the most effective protective measures possible against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. Such studies are vital to the defence of the realm and we are very grateful to the Servicemen who have helped achieve the high standards of protection that are available for the members of the UK Armed Forces.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of state for Defence how many *(a)* prisoners of war, *(b)* physically disabled people, *(c)* people with learning difficulties and *(d)* people with a mental illness have been used in experiments at (i) Porton Down or (ii) other MOD establishments since 1965; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 7 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many *(a)* prisoners of war, *(b)* physically disabled people, *(c)* people with learning difficulties, and *(d)* people with a mental illness have been used in experiments at: (i) Porton Down, or (ii) other MOD establishments since 1965; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel, and

(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Human studies at CBDE are conducted with volunteers drawn from the three Armed Services, namely from amongst the men and women we seek to protect. No prisoners of war, physically disabled volunteers, volunteers with learning difficulties or volunteers with a mental illness has participated in studies by the Ministry of Defence.

4. In addition, to ensure that individual Service personnel are both physically and mentally fit before they participate in the human volunteer programme at Porton Down, their Service medical documents are reviewed at CBDE before the volunteers attend for studies. No volunteer is accepted for studies at CBDE with a medical history which indicates a physical disability, a mental illness or a learning difficulty. Finally, all volunteers on arrival at CBDE Porton

Down are given an initial medical examination to ensure that they are fit before they participate in the study.

Boarding School Allowance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cost of private education for children of service men funded by his Ministry for each year since 1979.

Mr. Soames: The total cost of boarding school allowance paid by my Department in each year since 1979 is as follows:

Date	*Amount* £
1979–80	31,010,000
1980–81	47,240,000
1981–82	59,960,000
1982–83	66,380,000
1983–84	72,650,000
1984–85	77,870,000
1985–86	85,000,000
1986–87	93,600,000
1987–88	106,580,000
1988–89	107,100,000
1989–90	104,510,000
1990–91	105,610,000
1991–92	115,350,000
1992–93	116,720,000
1993–94	113,610,000

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost limit for each pupil cost per annum in respect of private education of children of servicemen funded by his Ministry.

Mr. Soames: Boarding school allowance is paid up to a maximum annual limit, and service parents in receipt are expected to make a contribution of 10 per cent. to the fees. The maximum annual limits admissible for 1994–1995 are as follows:

Rate	*Per annum* £
Junior	5,358
Senior	6,579
SENA[1]	8,772

[1] Special Educational Needs Allowance

Where fees are higher than these maximum rates of boarding school allowance, parents are expected to make up any shortfall themselves.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the schools and *(b)* the number of pupils at each for whom his Department has paid fees for each year since 1990, and if he will give the total number of pupils thus funded in each year since 1990.

Mr. Soames: A copy of the most recently complied list of schools which are admissible for parents of service children to claim boarding school allowance was placed in the Library of the House on 16 January 1995. This list includes information on the number of service children attending each school in June 1994. This information is not collected annually, and is therefore not held in this format for each year since 1990. The only additional data available pertains to 1992 and the accuracy of this information can no longer be validated. The total number of pupils for whom boarding school allowance was claimed in each year since 1990 is as follows:

1990–1991: 17,910
1991–1992: 16,208
1992–1993: 15,120
1993–1994; 12,567

Abortion

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what grounds for termination of pregnancy were assumed to exist when a service woman was told by the Army that this was one of three options open to her under which her pregnancy need not have required her to be discharged.

Mr. Soames: The provisions of the Abortion Act 1967 apply to service women as well as to their civilian counterparts; and grounds for termination of pregnancy must be within those specified under the Act, as certified by two medical practitioners in accordance with the procedures laid down under the Act. Before the services introduced maternity leave, a pregnant service woman would have had three options other than seeking termination of pregnancy. These were *(a)* choosing to leave the service on pregnancy, without returning in the near future; *(b)* seeking re-enlistment after giving birth, having made arrangements as a working mother for the care of her child; *(c)* seeking re-enlistment after giving birth, having had the child adopted.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department of National Heritage was created only in April 1992 and the Royal Parks agency in April 1993. The Historic Royal Palaces agency was created in October 1989. Within these time frames, the latest available figures show that seven staff employed by my Department and its two agencies have applied for career breaks. All of those who applied were women and none have had their employment terminated.

Tourism

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how he proposes to encourage the extension of tourism to areas of England which have not significantly benefited from it in the past.

Mr. Dorrell: The English tourist board will allocate £7 million in this financial year to the regional tourist boards, which are responsible for the promotion of tourism in their areas.

Tourism projects are also eligible for support from the European regional development fund in selected areas and from the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the average annual rate of growth in expenditure on tourism in each of the member states of the European Union between 1980 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The available figures for the average annual growth of international tourism receipts in member states of the European Union between 1980 and 1992 is as follows:

	Percentage
Austria	7.2
Denmark	9.1
Finland	5.3
France	9.7
Germany	4.4
Greece	5.4
Ireland	10.8
Italy	8.4
Netherlands	9.6
Portugal	10.3
Spain	10.1
Sweden	10.2
United Kingdom	5.9
Belgium and Luxembourg	7.0

Separate figures for Belgium and Luxembourg are not available.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects the publication of the European Union Green Paper on tourism.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has been informed that the European Commission plans to approve the text of the Green Paper during March. No publication date has yet been set.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the potential of the Internet to promote international awareness of United Kingdom tourism.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department provides funding to the British Tourist Authority which is responsible for promoting international awareness of the United Kingdom as a tourist destination. The BTA undertakes detailed assessments of marketing opportunities abroad. That work has not as yet included an assessment of the potential of Internet.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment his Department has made of the loss to the tourism industry within Great Britain of the withdrawal of all Motorail trains and the loss of sleeping car services between London, Carlisle and Fort William, and between Plymouth and Glasgow.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* My Department has not made such an assessment. However, the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising will take into account representations on the economic benefits of all ScotRail services in his consultations on the passenger service requirement for ScotRail later this year.

Digital Television

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he intends to set out the framework for the operation of digital television services; and if he will list those representations that he has received on this matter since 14 July 1994.

Mr. Dorrell: We hope to set out later this year the framework that we propose for the operation of digital television services. I have received no representations, but my officials are in touch with the major broadcasters and others who have expressed an interest.

Independent National Radio Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how he plans to ensure quality in independent national radio from 2000 onwards, when the three existing licences will be re-awarded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the Broadcasting Act 1990, the licensing of independent national radio services is a matter for the Radio Authority, which is required, with respect to the licensing of independent radio services, to facilitate the provision of licensed services, which taken as a whole are of high quality.

Mr. Roy Tutty

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what salary Mr. Roy Tutty will receive for his secondment to the tourism division of the Department; and what will be the cost to the Exchequer of this appointment.

Mr. Dorrell: Mr Tutty's salary is a matter for Forte plc and Mr. Tutty to determine. My Department will make a contribution to his salary equivalent to the amount paid to a civil servant in the grade 5 pay range.

Television Licences

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total revenue from television licences in 1994 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland.

Mr. Dorrell: Total television licence revenue in the United Kingdom for the financial year 1993–94 was £1,640 million, of which an estimated £144 million was collected in Scotland.

Children's Play

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for his Department to fund directly the National Voluntary Council for Children's Play.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department currently has no budget for children's play. I understand that the NVCCP has submitted an application to the Sports Council trust company for an extension of its present grant in to 1995–96. In relation to funding for children's play from October 1995, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 2 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *640*.

Budget Accommodation

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the progress of his study of budget accommodation.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department is drawing up plans for a benchmarking initiative, the objective of which is to help accommodation providers to raise both profitability and standards of service. We are working in close co-operation with the Confederation of British Industry on this project. The first step will be to discuss the outline plans with a number of industry representatives, following which I hope to be able to make an early announcement of the full details, including the timetable and methodology.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Grameen Trust

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for funding the Grameen trust training programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We are currently considering the Grameen trust's request for funding for its training programme.

World Bank

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures his Department has taken to ensure that the World bank abides by its own operational guidelines.

Mr. Baldry: We expect the World bank to maintain effective control systems—including internal review, internal audit, evaluation and the inspection panel—to ensure adherence to operational policies; and will continue to keep under review the scope for improvements in these systems.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the review of the World bank's revised disclosure of information policy took place as planned; what further improvements the review indicated were necessary; and what measures he is taking to implement improvements.

Mr. Baldry: A report reviewing the World bank's experience in implementing its revised information disclosure policy was completed in January 1995. The report concludes that the bank has made substantial progress, and notes that it is continuing to intensify its efforts in two areas in particular: (i) staff training; and (ii) ensuring that available information is accessible to people in borrowing countries, especially those in project areas. We shall monitor the bank's efforts and make suggestions for improvements as necessary. We welcome the fact that the bank is also drawing on the views of non-governmental organisations to help identify problem areas and possible solutions. The report "Disclosure policy retrospective" is available through the bank's public information centre.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions the Government have withheld funds from any part of the World bank because agreed conditions for disbursal had not been met; if he will give details; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Circumstances have not arisen in which we deemed it necessary to withhold funds on those grounds.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps the World bank is taking to evaluate the effectiveness of its poverty alleviation activities; whether the recommendations of previous evaluations have been implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The World bank prepares an annual report on progress in implementing its poverty reduction strategy. The most recent report—"Poverty reduction and the World Bank: progress in Fiscal 1994", which is available through the bank's public information centre—summarises a wide range of activities designed to help the poor, based on the poverty reduction strategy outlined in the World Development Report 1990. The report notes that lack of effective poverty monitoring remains an issue, and outlines efforts under way to address this. It also acknowledges that slippage in the preparation of country poverty assessments needs to be reduced, without sacrificing quality or ownership by borrowers. We shall be reviewing proposals to strengthen the International Development Association's performance in these areas during the 11th replenishment negotiations.

International Development Association

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to attach binding conditions for effectiveness in poverty alleviation to any future funding of the International Development Association.

Mr. Baldry: We shall be working closely with other donors during discussions on the 11th replenishment of the International Development Association to agree measures which will enhance IDA's effectiveness and strengthen its focus on poverty reduction, sound economic

management and environmentally sustainable development.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evaluation has been made by his Department of the effectiveness of the conditions attached to *(a)* the ninth and *(b)* the 10th replenishment of the International Development Association.

Mr. Baldry: The World bank prepared annual reports on progress in implementing IDA-9 objectives. It is doing the same for IDA-10, and the first year's review, "The first year of IDA-10: review of the FY94 programme" is available through the bank's public information centre. We consider these reports present a fair assessment of results achieved. They also note where performance has been mixed, for example, preparation of national environmental action plans and poverty assessments and effective poverty monitoring. We continue to work with other donors for more effective implementation by IDA of its policies.

Nepal (Hydro Project)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further assessment he has made of the World bank's appraisal of the Arun III hydro power project, including the economic analysis and justification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Before completing our assessment, including reviewing the outcome of the inspection panel's investigation, we need to await a decision by the new Nepalese Government on whether they wish to request International Development Association financing of the project.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank to press for the inspection panel consideration of Arun III to be extended to include proper consideration of alternative schemes.

Mr. Baldry: The World bank board has authorised investigation of the three areas recommended by the inspection panel, namely whether the International Development Association policies and procedures have been observed with respect to environmental assessment, indigenous peoples and involuntary resettlement. The panel did not recommend investigation of IDA's compliance with policies for the analysis of alternatives to Arun III. In the circumstances, we see no case for re-opening the board's decision.

Multilateral Development Banks

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the task force on multilateral development banks was scheduled to start its work; when work started; what has been the ODA's contribution to the work of the task force; what has been achieved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: At its meeting on 26 April 1994, the development committee decided to set up a task force to review the development role being played by the multilateral development banks. These are the World bank, the Asian development bank, the African development bank, the Inter-American development bank and the European bank for reconstruction and development. Achieving international agreement on the composition and other aspects of the task force took longer than anticipated. The first meeting was held on 6 to 7 December 1994 when a work programme was agreed. The task force will meet a number of times during 1995 and expects to produce its final report about 12 months from now. An interim report will be available to the development committee at its autumn 1995 meeting. The UK representative is a senior ODA official.

Angola

Mr. Wilshire (Spelthorne): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to provide additional humanitarian aid to the people of Angola.

Mr. Baldry: We have pledged £5 million for humanitarian assistance to Angola in response to the United Nations 1995 appeal.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he is giving to the statement by the second international affairs conference against the embargo on Iraq on 18 and 19 February, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The contents of the statement by the international affairs conference have been noted.

Our position on sanctions is well known; we believe that there should be no question of lifting sanctions against Iraq until Iraq complies fully with its international obligations under all relevant Security Council resolutions.

We will continue to press Iraq to put an end to its cynical exploitation of the suffering of its people by accepting UN offers of oil sales to finance the purchase of humanitarian supplies.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he has taken to reinforce the peace process in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: All parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka are well aware of our continued support for a negotiated settlement. We welcome the on-going peace process and stand ready to contribute to the reconstruction of the areas affected by the fighting.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make a statement on forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union.

Mr. David Davis: The following meetings are planned:

March 6–7: Foreign Affairs Council
March 9: Justice/Interior Council, Environment Council
March 10: Justice/Interior Council, Research Council
March 13–14: Transport Council

March 20: ECOFIN
March 27: Social Affairs Council
March 27–28: Agriculture Council
March 30: Consumer Council
March 31: Education Council, Youth Council

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

6–7 March: Foreign Affairs Council
Provisional agenda:
Racism and Xenophobia
Council Report on the Study Group
Stability Pact
Former Yugoslavia/Croatia
Nuclear Non-Proliferation
Relation with Asia
Relations with Republic of Korea
Relations with Russia
Relations with Slovenia
Mediterranean policy. State of negotiations with Israel, Morocco, and Tunisia. Preparation for Euro-mediterranean Conference
Relations with Turkey
Relations with Malta and Cyprus
Relations with Lebanon
Middle East Peace Process
Trade questions
Rum

9-10 March: Justice/Interior Council
Provisional agenda:
Adoption of provisional agenda
Adoption of "A" points
Fight against terrorism: conclusion of seminar on 17 February 1995, and follow up to the Ministerial debate at Informal council on 26 January 1995.
EUROPOL
Presidency oral report on the state of work on the Convention
Article 2 and annex, remit and objectives
Article 5, rights of access
Burden sharing
Racism and Xenophobia
Convention on simplified extradition procedures (Presidency hopes it will be adopted)
Brussels II Convention on enforcement and recognition of judicial decisions in matrimonial matters
Protection of the financial interests of the communities (fraud)
Customs Information Systems Convention
EDU (Europol Drugs Unit)
Minimum guarantees for Asylum seekers
Uniform format for visas
Title VI financing

9 March: Environment Council
IPPC (Integrated Pollution Prevention & Control) (common position)
Directive on ambient air quality
Revision to Birds Directive (orientation debate)
Directive on ecological quality of water (orientation debate)
Revision to Seveso Directive (orientation debate)
Climate change (draft conclusions)
Preparation for next meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development (draft conclusions)
Protection of the Mediterranean (draft conclusions)

10 March: Research Council
Research coordination
Role of Crest
INTAS
IMS. Intelligent Manufacturing Systems Agreement Negotiating Mandate
"A" point. EC/Canada Scientific and Technological Agreement

13–14 March: Transport Council
Likely agenda:
Promotion of rail and combined transport (draft resolution)
High-speed train interoperability (political agreement)
Harmonisation of national boatmasters' certificates (common position)
Working time and training in road transport sector (draft resolution)
Dangerous goods adviser (common position)
Carriage of dangerous goods by rail (common position)
Agreement of mandate for negotiations with Switzerland on road and air transport
Ro-Ro ferry safety (ISM code) (political agreement)
Maritime statistics (adoption)
Maritime policy and external relations (orientation debate)
Aviation—external relations (orientation debate)
Aviation—flagging out (draft resolution)
Trans-European Networks (general debate)

20 March: ECOFIN
Provisional agenda:
Indirect taxation
Financial services
Court of Auditors report on 1993 budget

27 March: Social Affairs Council
Postal workers directive
Memorandum on social clauses in trade agreements
Resolution on implementation of legislation in the social field
Resolution on the role of women in decision making
Acquired rights directive (possible)

27–28 March: Agriculture Council
Sugar reform
Price fixing proposals
Plant Breeders Rights Office
Set-aside/Agri-environment
Report on milk quota implementations in Italy and Greece (possible)

30 March: Consumer Council
Follow up to Commission's Green Papers on Access to Justice and on Guarantees and After-sales service.
Discussion of French memorandum on future areas for consumer policy
Reviews of directives on consumer credit, toys, and cosmetic products
Labelling of products
Cross border payments
Amendments of directives on unit pricing: possible adoption of common position as "A" point
Distance Selling Directive: common position (likely)
Precious metals directive

31 March: Education/Youth Council
Unconfirmed agenda:
Decision adopting the European Year of Education and Training
Resolution on improving and diversifying language learning and teaching within the EU
Conclusion of Education/training co-operation agreements with the US and Canada
Recognition of the academic and professional qualifications
Postgraduate mobility
Resolution on Youth Information

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will

make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 6 to 7 February.

Mr. David Davis: The Council unanimously agreed the mandate to enable the Commission to open GATT article XXIV.6 negotiations with interested GATT contracting parties on compensation for tariff increases in Austria, Sweden and Finland following their accession to the European Union. No vote was taken. On EU-US relations, M. Juppe reported briefly on his recent visit with Sir Leon Brittan to the US.

The Presidency and the Commission updated Ministers on preparations for the concluding conference to adopt the stability pact in Paris on 20 to 21 March.

The Council agreed, without a vote, an EC position on trade policy measures for the mid-term review of the fourth Lomé convention, to present to the African, Caribbean and Pacific side in preparation for the EU-ACP ministerial meeting on 16 to 17 February. The Council also discussed the eighth European development fund, which will finance the second half of the Convention. The Presidency called a special meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 15 February, the eve of the EU-ACP ministerial meeting to discuss the size of the EU offer for EDF VIII.

The Council discussed current issues in the WTO, and possible new issues for WTO consideration. There was agreement on the importance of ensuring that the WTO was able to function effectively; and that outstanding sectoral negotiations were completed within the timetable agreed at the end of the Uruguay round. The Council asked the article 113 Committee and COREPER to prepare negotiating directives for the outstanding services negotiations for the Council to consider on 6 March. On new issues, the Presidency requested the Commission, in liaison with the Article 113 Committee, to produce discussion documents on the various subjects suggested for WTO consideration at the April 1994 Marrakesh meeting.

The Council agreed on the need for the early appointment of the WTO Director-General, and decided to make further efforts to promote the candidature of Mr. Ruggiero.

There was no substantive discussion on rum. The Commission proposals were referred to the working group for further discussion, before returning to the 6 March FAC. Lady Chalker restated UK support for the total abolition of all quotas on ACP and OCT rum by 1 January 1996.

The Council discussed developments in Chechnya and issued a statement

The Council discussed the implementation of the G7 action plan on nuclear safety to Ukraine.

On the Mediterranean, the Commission reported on progress in the negotiations for new agreements with Israel, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Council discussed the terms for customs union with Turkey and the forthcoming review of the Cypriot application for the EU membership.

The Council reiterated support for a peaceful resolution of conflict in the former Yugoslavia. They stressed the importance of recognition between the states which emerged from the former Yugoslavia.

On Croatia, the Council recalled its support for the international conference on the former Yugoslavia's plan for a political solution and called upon the parties to begin negotiations. It reaffirmed its support for the presence of UNPROFOR in Croatia.

The Council reached a political agreement on the data protection directive and accompanying minutes statements. The UK indicated that it would abstain when the directive came as an A point to a future Council.

On relations with central and eastern Europe, the presidency outlined its plans for implementing the pre-accession strategy for central European associates agreed at the Essen European Council. There were linguistic scrutiny reserves from Finland and Sweden.

The Council agreed the following unanimously as A points: a partnership agreement with Kyrgyzstan; negotiating positions in the WTO on non-preferential rules of origin; a decision giving continued support to the European Union Administration of the town of Mostar; amendments to the Council's rules of procedure following enlargement; Council regulations on certain imported wines and amendments to regulations on the important of wines, grape juice and grape must.

Gibraltar Airport

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the British Government's policy as to the future of Gibraltar's airport.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 22 November 1994, *Official Report* Column *108* by my hon. friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

HIV/AIDS

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the improvement likely to result from the new united secretariat of the WHO global programme on AIDS; and if he will make it his policy to keep the matter under review.

Mr. Baldry: The new joint and co-sponsored United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS—due to start in January 1996—will develop common policies and strategies to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic for the six co-sponsoring agencies: World Health Organisation, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, and the World bank. The programme aims to improve co-ordination of UN agency support for HIV/AIDS action at country level, to lead to more effective prevention of HIV infection, and better care for those infected. The progress of the new programme in meeting its objectives will be closely monitored.

Nigeria

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring is undertaken of the human rights situation in Nigeria by the British high commission in Lagos; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Our high commission follows developments in the human rights situation closely. We have regular contacts with a wide

range of Nigerian human rights organisations and other groups, and have made our concerns clear to the Nigerian Government.

Zaire (Rwandan Refugees)

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on the UN decision to request units of the army of Zaire to police camps for displaced Rwandese in Zaire; what operational resources the UN has put in place to ensure that the Zairean military authorities comply with international standards, including the protection of the rights of refugees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has contributed £0.5 million towards the UNHCR's costs for the 50-man international camp security liaison group being set up to monitor the operation and liaise with the Zaire authorities under the agreement on camp security signed between the UNHCR and Zaire.

EMPLOYMENT

Non-wage Labour Costs

13. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of high non-wage labour costs on employment prospects.

Mr. Portillo: Non-wage labour costs are lower in the United Kingdom than in most countries of the European Union. Higher burdens imposed on employers make it more difficult for them to create jobs.

Labour Statistics

14. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of two-adult households have *(a)* two earners or *(b)* no earners.

Mr. Oppenheim: Latest estimates from the summer 1994 labour force survey show that, of two-adult households in which at least one person is of working age, 13 per cent. have neither adult in employment, while 56 per cent. have both adults in employment.

Child Care

15. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for improving child care to assist women into employment.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle).

Wilton Carpet Workers

16. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what financial or other assistance he will make available to carpet workers in Wilton who may be offered alternative jobs in Bradford in the wake of the closure of the Wilton royal carpet factory.

Mr. Paice: It would be inappropriate for the Government to intervene in an individual's decision to relocate to another part of the country. For those members of staff who decide that they are unable to relocate, the Employment Service and Wiltshire training and enterprise council have set up a range of initiatives designed to help them secure alternative employment.

Unemployment

17. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for unemployment; and what were the equivalent figures in June 1979.

Mr. Portillo: On the seasonally adjusted basis there were 2,389,700 people claiming unemployment-related benefits in January 1995 compared with 1,067,400 in June 1979.

23. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further measures he proposes to reduce unemployment in the next two years.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government will continue with the policies which created 266,000 new jobs last year, and reduced unemployment by 582,000 since December 1992, and will resist measures which destroy jobs, such as the social chapter, the national minimum wage and a training levy.

Industrial Relations

18. **Mr. Reddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is *(a)* the United Kingdom current strike record and *(b)* that in Germany; and what were the figures in 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1993, the United Kingdom and Germany each lost 600,000 days to labour disputes. In 1979, the United Kingdom lost 29.5 million days, over 50 times West Germany's total of 500,000 million.

Youth Employment

19. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met his fellow EU Employment Ministers to discuss youth employment.

Mr. Paice: Employment matters naturally feature prominently in the discussions my right hon. and hon. Friends have had with their ministerial counterparts. I am pleased to say that, at 14 per cent., youth unemployment in the United Kingdom is much lower than the Community average of 19.6 per cent. This shows the benefits to young people of the Government's policy of promoting flexibility in the labour market.

Workplace Nurseries

21. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workplace nurseries are presently in operation.

Miss Widdecombe: We do not have the precise figures requested. However, in the 1990 British social attitudes survey, 5 per cent. of employees interviewed said they had an employer's nursery available to them.

Redundancies, Merseyside

22. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many redundancies have been notified on Merseyside in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: According to the summer 1994 labour force survey, 22,000 people in the north-west had

been made redundant in the three months prior to interview. Information is not available for Merseyside.

Single Employment Market

24. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if there is a single employment market in the European Union.

Mr. Portillo: In practice, there is a range of largely separate labour markets within the European Union and its member states.

Part-time Jobs

25. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of part-time jobs are taken by women with an earning partner.

Mr. Oppenheim: Latest estimates from the summer 1994 labour force survey show that 59 per cent. of people whose main job was part time were women with a partner in employment.

Training and Enterprise Councils

26. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the targets proposed for training and enterprise councils in 1995–96.

Mr. Paice: Negotiations are currently taking place between the Department and individual training and enterprise councils about contracts for 1995–96. Discussions about targets form part of those negotiations.

Women

27. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to improve the training opportunities available to women.

Mr. Paice: Women returners and lone parents may enter training for work without having to be registered as unemployed. They may train on a part-time basis and receive child care support. The Department is also promoting women's training and employment opportunities in England through the fair play initiative.

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the Government's policies for improving women's opportunities in the labour market and beyond.

Miss Widdecombe: By promoting a competitive, efficient and flexible labour market, the Government have widened choice and opportunities for everyone, men and women.

There are 12.1 million women economically active, and women make up 45 per cent. of the work force in employment. Since 1984, there has been a 14 per cent. increase in women working full time and a 19 per cent. increase in women working part time.

The number of self-employed women has risen by 80 per cent. since 1981. The proportion of women in management and professional jobs increased from 25 per cent. in 1984 to 30 per cent. in 1994.

The pay gap between men and women continues to narrow and now stands at approximately 20 per cent.—the lowest it has ever been.

In 1992, the latest year for which data are available, the UK had the second highest female labour market participation rate in the European Union, as then constituted, after Denmark.

In the EU, only the UK has a lower unemployment rate for women than men.

To help this process of improvement, the Government have introduced specific policies and programmes. For example, workplace nurseries have been exempted from income tax since 1990.

The Employment Department is channelling £45 million through training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies to help create up to 50,000 new out-of-school child care places for the over-fives.

From October 1994, help with child care charges is available to families receiving family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit. Child care charges of up to £40 are offset against earning when benefit entitlement is calculated. In the longer term, an estimated 150,000 families are expected to benefit from this new measure, including 50,000 families who are expected to take up work as a direct result of this change.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is consulting on ways to achieve my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's target to provide, over time, a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish to take it up.

In addition, "Fair Play for Women"—a joint Government/Equal Opportunities Commission partnership—was launched in April 1994 to tackle the barriers facing women in economic and social life. Regional consortia have been established in each of the 10 Government office regions in England and each consortium is developing and implementing an "Agenda for Action" based on local priorities. Chwarae Teg, set up in south Wales in 1992, now covers the whole of Wales in a programme to expand women's participation in the work force at all levels.

In December 1994, the Government established a development unit on women in science, engineering and technology—SET—to promote the role of women in SET.

In other fields, there has also been much progress. The proportion of public appointments held by women increased from 23 per cent. in 1990 to 30 per cent. in September 1994.

In health, the NHS is now screening over 80 per cent. of eligible women nationally for cervical cancer.

In 1992, more than two thirds of breast cancer screening programmes exceeded the 70 per cent. screening uptake target.

On domestic violence, the Government have set up interdepartmental groups at official and ministerial level to co-ordinate Government action to tackle this serious issue. Government-funded publicity campaigns have been mounted in England, Scotland and Wales to increase awareness of domestic violence. In Northern Ireland a publicity campaign, jointly funded by the Northern Ireland Office, the Department of Health and Social

Services and the Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation is due to be launched very shortly.

Long-term Unemployed

28. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the Government's policies are helping long-term unemployed people to find jobs.

Mr. Portillo: I believe that Government policies, to improve the operation of the labour market and to help the unemployed into jobs, have contributed to the fall in the number of long-term unemployed.

Training

29. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further discussions he has had with the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress about provisions for training.

Mr. Paice: My colleagues and I regularly meet the CBI and the TUC to discuss employment and training issues.

Labour Market Reforms

30. **Mr. Pickles:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the Government's labour market reforms on levels of unemployment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Oppenheim: Claimant unemployment in the United Kingdom has fallen by 582,000 since its peak in December 1992 and is now well below the EC average. I believe that Government policies to improve the operation of the labour market have been an important factor.

Social Chapter

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met other EU Employment Ministers to discuss the social chapter; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have not discussed the matter directly in the Social Affairs Council, but the Government have reaffirmed that they will not accept the draft social chapter which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister refused to agree at Maastricht.

Part-time Study

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the basis and source for the estimate that some 80,000 unemployed people are currently studying under the 21-hour rule; and how he intends to monitor the impact that the reduction to guided learning hours will have after April 1996; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The basis for the estimate that about 80,000 people are currently studying part-time while claiming unemployment benefits is information from claims and the labour force survey. The figure includes those studying under the 21-hour rule.

This is not a reduction. Courses of up to 16 guided learning hours may, of course, be supplemented by private study as long as this does not affect the individual's availability for, or efforts to find work.

Surveys will continue to be used to monitor the number of people studying part time while looking for work. We do not expect any change in the numbers of claimants helped or in the costs of the scheme.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money was not drawn by the South Thames training and enterprise council from his Department in respect of activity undertaken before period 9 in the year 1994–95.

Mr. Paice: South Thames training and enterprise council was given a budget by the Employment Department for the whole of 1994–95 to cover training and business support programmes. I expect that this budget will be totally drawn down by the end of the financial year.

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what funds *(a)* from his Department, and *(b)* from European sources which were available to South Thames TEC prior to the appointment of receivers, had not been claimed at the time by the TEC.

Mr. Paice: South Thames training and enterprise council was given budgets for the whole of 1994–95 to fund Employment Department training and business support programmes and European social fund programmes. I expect that these budgets will be totally drawn down by the end of the financial year.

Disabled People

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled people were employed in *(a)* Remploy, *(b)* local authority workshops, *(c)* voluntary run workshops, *(d)* local authority sheltered placements and *(e)* voluntary organisation sheltered placements in each of the last five years.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 7 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of disabled people who were employed on the Supported (formerly Sheltered) Employment scheme during the last five years. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The information you requested is shown in the table below. This shows the number employed at 31 March each year in each type of provision. The Remploy numbers shown relate to a yearly average.

I hope this is helpful.

	31 March 1990	*31 March 1991*	*31 March 1992*	*31 March 1993*	*31 March 1994*
Remploy	8,738	8,630	8,591	8,576	8,654
Local Authority Workshops	4,276	4,132	3,905	3,639	3,544
Voluntary Workshops	1,200	1,177	1,155	1,199	1,164
Local Authority Placements	3,010	3,338	3,438	3,502	3,602
Voluntary Placements	3,426	3,500	3,548	3,708	3,859

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from employers and business organisations calling for firms employing fewer than 20 people to be exempted from a legislative requirement not to discriminate against disabled people; and if he will place such representations in the Library.

Miss Widdecombe: Seventy-two employers or employer associations responded to the Government consultative document "A Consultation on Government Measures to Tackle Discrimination Against Disabled People" on the issue of whether small firms should be excluded from the proposed employment right for disabled people. Of those that expressed a clear preference, six employer associations and one employer were in favour of exempting small firms and three employer associations and 10 employers were against.

It is not our policy to publish particular responses to the consultation, but a copy of the analysis of responses has been placed in the Library.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people who have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities would be considered as *(a)* unsuitable for employment, *(b)* less suitable for employment than other people and *(c)* significantly impeded from performing their employment duties.

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people, *(a)* by type of disability and *(b)* by age who have a progressive condition which will lead to them (i) registering as disabled or (ii) having a physical or mental impairment which will have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Miss Widdecombe: The labour force survey provides information about people who have a disability or health problem which they expect to last over 12 months and which affects the type of work that they can do. The available information from the summer 1994 LFS is shown in the following table.

It is not possible to say how many people with a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities would be considered unsuitable for employment, or less suitable for employment than other people. This would depend on the particular circumstances of the individual, and the nature of the employment in question. Nor is it possible to estimate by type of disability and age the number of people who have a progressive condition and age the number of people who have a progressive condition which would lead them to registering as disabled. Registration under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1994 is voluntary and only a minority of disabled people choose to register.

Statistics are not available on people who have a progressive condition which will lead to them having a physical or mental impairment which will have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Numbers of people of working age who have a health problem or disability which limits the kind of paid work they can do, and which they expect to last more than 12 months by type of disability and age

Great Britain—Summer 1994 *Thousands*

	All ages	16-24 year olds	24-49 year olds	50—59-64 year olds[1]
All	3,696	384	1,610	1,703
Arms, legs, hands, feet, back and neck	2,196	120	930	1,146
Difficulty in seeing	155	32	69	55
Difficulty in hearing	114	14	44	56
Skin conditions, allergies	162	51	78	32
Chest and breathing problems	356	80	156	120
Heart, blood, pressure and circulation	222	–[2]	67	151
Stomach, liver, kidney and digestion	80	–[2]	44	29
Diabetes	75	14	34	27
Depression and bad nerves	96	–[2]	59	30
Epilepsy	51	10	35	–[2]
Severe or specific learning difficulties	48	23	20	–[2]
Mental illness, phobia and panics	46	–[2]	28	13
Other problems or disabilities	92	16	44	31

[1] Women aged 50–59 Men aged 50–64
[2] Estimates below 10,000 are not shown.
Source:
Labour Force Survey

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people registered under section 6 of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 are *(a)* below pension age, *(b)* pension age to 74, *(c)* 75 to 84 and *(d)* 85 years and older, by type of disability and sex.

Miss Widdecombe: The register of disabled people established by the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 is kept locally, by the Employment Services's placing assessment and counselling teams. The number of names in the register is counted annually, in April. On 18 April 1994, there were 374,182 registered disabled people: of these, 277,294 were male and 96,888 were female.

I regret that information is not collected centrally on the numbers of registered disabled people by type of disability, or by age band. There is no upper age limit for registration. Disabled people who intend to remain in the labour market after reaching pension age may continue to be registered as disabled if they meet the eligibility criteria. However, the majority of registered disabled people are likely to be below pension age.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the register of disabled persons maintained under section 6 of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 would be considered to be *(a)* unsuitable for employment, *(b)* less suitable for employment than other people and *(c)* significantly impeded from performing their employment duties.

Miss Widdecombe: I regret that information is not available in the form requested. The eligibility criteria for registration as disabled under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts include being capable of some form of employment, under either open or supported conditions. However, the register does not classify

registered disabled people in terms of their relative suitability for employment or the extent to which they may be impeded in performing particular employment duties.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for employment what role will be played by adjudication officers in deciding whether a claimant's application to undertake guided learning in further education complies with clause 7(8) of the proposed jobseeker's agreement.

Miss Widdecombe: The jobseeker and the employment officer will seek to draw up a jobseeker's agreement. If they are unable to agree, either party can refer the proposed terms and conditions of the jobseeker's agreement to an adjudication officer.

The adjudication officer will determine if the proposed terms and conditions of the agreement—including any part-time study—would allow the jobseeker, if he complied with them, to meet the conditions of jobseeker's allowance. In making his determination, the adjudication officer will expect to have regard to the legislation and any relevant case law. He will also be assisted by any guidance issued by the chief adjudication officer.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how employment officers will evaluate whether or not private study periods undertaken by claimants within their jobseeker's contract in support of part-time guided learning interferes with attempts to seek employment.

Miss Widdecombe: The jobseeker will be asked to provide the employment officer with evidence that he is available for, and actively seeking, employment. This will normally happen when the jobseeker attends the jobcentre for an interview. If, in the employment officer's opinion, the evidence is insufficient, he will refer the matter to an independent adjudication officer for a determination.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to encourage employment officers to build in literacy training into the jobseeker's contract in cases where it is evident the claimant of benefit has fared poorly in genuine attempts to secure employment due to illiteracy or poor literacy.

Miss Widdecombe: The jobseeker's agreement will record the steps that a jobseeker will take to get back to work. It is not a contract. If the employment officer and the jobseeker identify that a jobseeker's jobsearch would benefit from help with his reading or writing, this can be noted on the agreement and appropriate action taken. Help can be provided, if appropriate, through supportive job clubs, special restart courses and training for work.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for employment, pursuant to his letter of 16 February to all hon. Members, what evaluations were made using what database and what projections, in coming to the conclusion that there would be no reduction in the number of benefit claimants entitled to benefit under the new proposals for people enroling on part-time courses while claiming jobseeker's allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: Calculations were based largely on the results of a survey carried out by the Further Education Funding Council in 1993–94. This provided separate details of the distribution of student's guided learning hours for students on courses classified as full time and part time. Currently, students pursuing full-time courses cannot qualify for social security benefits, while those studying part time may do so, subject to meeting the other benefit conditions.

From these data, it is possible to deduce the number of students on courses classified as full time whose weekly guided learning hours were up to 16, relative to the number formerly classified as part time whose weekly hours were more than 16. The new threshold, based on this information, is designed to allow the same number of people to study while receiving benefit as do so currently.

"Breathe Freely" Campaign

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans his Department has to evaluate the effectiveness of the Health and Safety Executive "Breathe Freely" awareness campaign of occupational asthma; what consideration he has given to extending it beyond April 1995; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: In May 1995, the Health and Safety Executive will be launching a major new three to four-year campaign to help improve employers' management of health risks. The first year will include a major emphasis on respiratory sensitisers. This campaign will therefore build on work of the "Breathe Freely" campaign.

During the autumn, the HSE intends to commission an independent evaluation of the impact of the "Breathe Freely" campaign. In the longer term, the HSE will continue to monitor the incidence of occupational asthma to determine the effectiveness of the campaigns.

Occupational Asthma

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate his Department has made of the total cost to industry of occupational asthma.

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1992, the Health and Safety Executive estimated that occupational asthma accounted for £53 million annually in lost output.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers have been prosecuted for failing to protect workers from exposure to hazardous substances that include respiratory sensitisers under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994.

Mr. Oppenheim: None. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 came only into force on 16 January 1995. Under the COSHH Regulations 1988, from October 1989 until December 1994 there were a total of 282 prosecutions of which 103 were under regulation 7 of COSHH, which specifically requires employers to prevent or control exposure to substances hazardous to health.

Coal Mine Accidents

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many accidents have occurred in coal mines *(a)* in each month of 1994 and *(b)* since the beginning of 1995; and how many of them in each period have resulted in serious injury or death.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not yet available for the whole period.

However, information is available for the period January to March 1994 and is shown in the following table.

	Total accidents	*Fatalities*	*Major injuries*
January	75	0	24
February	61	0	19
March	57	0	8

Figures for the year April 1994 to March 1995 have not been validated and will not be confirmed until the Health and Safety Commission's annual report is published in November 1995.

The statistics will be available by month from that date.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Defence Exports

Mrs. Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what special facilities are available from the Export Credits Guarantee Department to British exporters of defence equipment over and above the support granted to British exporters of other goods and services.

Mr. Needham: None.

Coal Subsidies

Mr. Stern: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the subsidy outlined in the White Paper "Prospects for Coal", Cm 2235, will end; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page: Since the coal subsidy was announced in March 1993, 10 offers have been made. To date, £9,053,711 has been paid in respect of almost 800,000 tonnes of coal delivered since April 1993. The majority of offers have been to the private sector, most helping to sustain new production from pits where British Coal had ceased operations.

It was envisaged at the time of the White Paper that the subsidy would only be temporary. The Government indicated then that the scheme would finish at about the time of privatisation. The "Guidelines for Applicants" explain that the subsidy is available only for the period up to the end of March 1995. Only deliveries made before then could be eligible for subsidy. Any applications which remain outstanding should be submitted to my Department no later than 31 March 1995.

Information Technology

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will identify the key issues arising out of the G7 conference on the information society; and what steps his Department will be taking to address them.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 2 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *715–16*. The main area of follow-up to arise from the G7 conference will be the implementation of the 11 collaborative pilot projects which were launched by the G7 Ministers to demonstrate the potential of the information society. The UK will be playing an active role in the implementation of these projects. I shall be asking the multi-media industry advisory group—which I established to advise me on multi-media and information highways—to advise on how best to take this work forward. I am also in contact with other Government Departments.

The DTI will be looking in more detail at standards, interconnection and intellectual property issues raised at the conference.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the aggregate payments made to the Ministry of Defence, Defence Export Services Organisation or IMS Ltd. in each year since 1979 in respect of claims arising from contracts with ECGD support.

Mr. Needham: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information about the commercial relations between the ECGD and individual third parties unless the relevant parities have agreed to this. I can, however, inform the hon. Member that the ECGD has made no payments to the Ministry of Defence, of which DESO forms a part, in respect of claims on ECGD-supported contracts.

Konver

Mr. Dover: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the spending to date on Konver I funding within the United Kingdom with particular reference to the possibility of reallocating unspent funding to other UK regions.

Mr. Eggar: Konver I projects are, generally, progressing well. Some underspends have been identified, as is normal with such programmes, and where possible recommitment of grant will be made. The Konver monitoring committee will consider the position at its next meeting.

EU Funding

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in respect of the information about European regional development fund and European social fund contained in the *Official Report*, 19 January, columns *593–94*, if he will break down the figures for each local authority in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Page: The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the change in the volume of United Kingdom exports of manufactures *(a)* to third countries and *(b)* to the EEC in each year between 1989 and 1992 when the deutschmark appreciated against non-ERM currencies.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows.

Change in volume of United Kingdom exports of manufactures

Year	(a) to countries outside the EU Per cent.	(b) to EU countries Per cent.
1989	+5	+11
1990	+2	+12
1991	–6	+9
1992	+1	+2

Source:
Tables A17 and A18 of "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the value, volume and unit value of imports and exports of manufacturers in each of the main manufacturing countries.

Mr. Needham: The information on the main manufacturing countries' value of trade in manufactures is given in the table. Information on the volume of imports and exports of manufactures for the UK, Germany, Sweden, and Japan is regularly published in "OECD Monthly Statistics of Foreign Trade", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Corresponding information for the other main manufacturing countries is not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. Unit value indices for exports of manufactures for the main manufacturing countries are regularly published by the Central Statistical Office in "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Corresponding information on import unit values of manufactures is not readily available, and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Main manufacturing countries' trade in manufactures[1] 1993

Country	US $ millions Imports	Exports
United Kingdom	162,087	146,670
Belgium-Luxembourg[2]	88,597	97,029
France	160,960	170,705
Germany	249,097	329,165
Italy	102,449	159,473
Netherlands	92,859	88,754
Sweden	36,846	46,817
Switzerland	53,204	61,270
United States	475,052	341,238
Canada	109,601	90,638
Japan[3]	125,150	354,804

Notes:
[1] Manufactures are defined as sections 5 to 8 of the standard international trade classification.
[2] 1992.
[3] Includes Section 9.
Source:
OECD series A, OECD series C, UN series D, CSO.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department gives to businesses developing closed circuit television and other kinds of support for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The normal range of industry support schemes is available to firms developing products for this market. The Department does not keep statistics in a form which would indicate the numbers of firms which may have benefited from assistance with projects involving products for the disabled.

Brewing Industry

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive the report of the Director of Fair Trading on the brewing industry.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade expects to receive the report when the inquiry has been completed to the satisfaction of the Director General of Fair Trading. When announcing the inquiry on 7 February, the Office of Fair Trading indicated that it expected it to last three months, although this is dependent on receiving the full co-operation of the industry.

Coal Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the consultants retained by his Department in connection with the sale of British Coal giving in each case the fees paid.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 21 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *522–23*.

WALES

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Redwood: Eighty-five women and no men in my Department—including Cadw—have applied for career breaks in the last five years. None of these has had her employment terminated.

Community Areas and Councils

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each county and district council area in Wales and for Wales as a whole the number of *(a)* community areas, *(b)* community and town councils and *(c)* community or town councils which have (i) ceased to exist or (ii) been established during each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[pursuant to his reply, 16 February 1995, c.763–64.]:* Unfortunately, some district councils have provided inaccurate information. The correct figures are set out in the following table:

Numbers of community areas and town/community councils in Wales

County councils	*District/borough councils*	*Numbers of community areas*	*Numbers of town/community councils*
Clwyd		127	122
	Alyn and Deeside	13	13
	Colwyn	19	16
	Delyn	21	21
	Glyndwr	35	35
	Rhuddlan	10	8
	Wrexham Maelor	29	29
Dyfed		202	202
	Carmarthen	41	41
	Ceredigion	51	51
	Dinefwr	23	23
	Llanelli	9	9
	Preseli Pembrokeshire	52	52
	South Pembrokeshire	26	26
Gwent		98	67
	Blaenau Gwent	9	5
	Islwyn	12	0
	Monmouth	32	32
	Newport	29	14
	Torfaen	16	16
Gwynedd		122	122
	Aberconwy	18	18
	Arfon	17	17
	Dwyfor	17	17
	Meirionnydd	30	30
	Ynys Mon	40	40
Mid Glamorgan		85	50
	Cynon Valley	11	3
	Merthyr Tydfil	12	1
	Ogwr	22	22
	Rhondda	16	0
	Rhymney Valley	14	14
	Taff Ely	10	10
Powys		108	108
	Brecknock	36	36
	Montgomeryshire	45	45
	Radnorshire	27	27
South Glamorgan		54	28
	Cardiff	30	5
	Vale of Glamorgan	24	23
West Glamorgan		69	43
	Port Talbot	12	0
	Lliw Valley	15	15
	Neath	14	14
	Swansea	28	14
Total for Wales		865	742

Industrial Output

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the estimate total output of production industries in Wales at *(a)* factor cost and *(b)* current prices for (i) 1993, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Total output of production industries in Wales at factor cost and current prices if estimated by the Central Statistical Office to have been (i) £7,111 million in 1993, (ii) £6,702 million in 1990 and (iii) £5,420 million 1987.

Minority Languages Charter

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects Her Majesty's Government to signify their approval of the Council for Europe charter of minority languages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Government Departments with an interest in the European charter for regional or minority languages are still considering its implication for the United Kingdom. The decision on whether to sign the charter must take into account the situation of each of the indigenous minority languages spoken within the United Kingdom.

Llanrwst Bypass

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which figures are being used by his Department for the cost-benefit analysis for the proposed Llanrwst bypass; if he will recalculate the cost-benefit analysis using the current figures submitted by a local group to his Department on 8 December 1994, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The cost-benefit analysis displayed at the 1993 public consultation on the proposed A470 Llanrwst bypass was based on a 1988 traffic survey. A further traffic survey is to be undertaken shortly and the results of that survey will be used in any recalculation of the analysis. The traffic information supplied by the local group is not statistically robust enough to be used in that way.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations have taken place with local authorities in Wales on their opinion on the proposals contained in paragraph 128 and 129 of the Government consultation paper on radioactive waste policy.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: These proposals were included in the Government's recent consultation document "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy—Preliminary Conclusions". It was sent to all local authorities in Wales and representations were received from South Glamorgan and Gwynedd county councils and Ynys Môn borough council.

NHS Administrative Costs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the administrative costs of the NHS in Wales for each year since 1979 in *(a)* cash prices and *(b)* current prices.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not available in cash terms. The following table shows the reported costs in

column 1 and those amounts converted to 1993–94 prices in column 2.

Administrative costs of the NHS in Wales

	(1) £000	(2) £000
1991–92	67,495	72,330
1992–93	68,298	70,388
1993–94	65,579	65,579

Source:

Annual accounts of district health authorities, Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Family health services authorities, NHS trusts and Health Promotion Wales.

Notes:

1. The figure for the cost of administration is taken to be that covering authority administration and purchasing expenses. This represents the total revenue expenditure on the pay and accommodation costs of staff of all disciplines and their support staff employed at headquarters levels together with the costs of the purchaser function. They exclude administration support in hospital departments and at other local levels which is regarded as operational expenditure.

2. 1993–94 figures are provisional and the latest available. It is not possible to provide information on a consistent basis for the years prior to 1991–92 because of changes to the format of accounts as a consequence of the NHS reforms.

Local Environment Charter

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the response he has received from county and district councils to the model charter, "Your Council and the Environment", issued on 25 November 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales sent copies of the local environment charter to all the county and district councils in Wales at the end of November 1993. Feedback received suggests that the document was generally well received; and many councils in Wales have developed their own environmental charters.

Training for Work

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what is the expected outturn for each training and enterprise council in Wales for training for work with respect to training weeks used by those training after finding work.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is provided in the following table:

Number of employed status training weeks expected to be delivered in 1994–95

	Number
Gwent	10,285
Mid-Glamorgan	11,435
North-East Wales	11,058
Powys	2,882
South Glamorgan	3,505
Targed	1,451
West Wales	6,262
Wales	46,878

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rateable Values

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to carry out a general revaluation of rateable values in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: The current valuation list was published on 31 December 1975 and came into effect on 1 April 1976. Since that time, major shifts in rental patterns have taken place in Northern Ireland and these are not reflected in the net annual values appearing in the list. The relative antiquity of the present list has given rise to many anomalies between different areas and between different classes of property, particularly in the non-domestic sector. A revaluation of the whole of the non-domestic sector will, therefore, be undertaken by the Valuation and Lands Agency and work on this will commence immediately. The domestic sector is not being reviewed at this time but the situation will be kept under review.

The new valuation list will be published on or before 31 December 1996 and will come into effect on 1 April 1997. Any ratepayer who is aggrieved by his or her valuation will have a statutory right of appeal.

Turf Lodge Area, Belfast

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people in the Turf Lodge area of west Belfast are currently receiving social security benefits of any kind;

(2) how many people in the Turf Lodge area applied for *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance in each of the last three years up to the end of 1994.

Mr. Moss: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in the Turf Lodge area have been unemployed for longer than three years.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is not available. However, the Turf Lodge area falls within the boundaries of the Upper Springfield ward and at January 1995, the latest date for which information is available, 355 people in this ward had been unemployed for longer than three years.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in the Turf Lodge area are currently in receipt of *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* housing benefit.

Mr. Moss: Statistics on social security benefits administered by the Social Security Agency cannot be broken down into small geographic areas without incurring disproportionate costs.

The number of people in the rented sector in the Turf Lodge area who are currently in receipt of housing benefit is 586. The number of owner-occupiers in the area in receipt of housing benefit cannot be provided as this information is only kept at district council level.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people from the Turf Lodge area are currently employed on action for community employment schemes.

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Dr. Joe Hendron, dated 3 March 1995:

Your recent parliamentary question to the Secretary of State regarding the number of people from the Turf Lodge area currently employed under ACE has been passed to me for reply.

In the absence of statistical information specifically relating to the Turf Lodge area, this response is based on ACE participants resident in the BT11 postal code area which, as your know, encompasses Turf Lodge. On 1st March 1995, 433 persons from the BT11 area were employed by 46 separate ACE Sponsors. Of course ACE Sponsors are not restricted to geographical areas from which they may recruit and it is therefore difficult to provide data which relates strictly to Turf Lodge.

You will be interested to know also that one of the organisations funded by the Agency under ACE is Turf Lodge Enterprise Scheme Ltd which primarily serves the Turf Lodge area. Although its employees are not recruited exclusively from the Turf Lodge area, the company currently receives funding to employ 70 people and can attract annual funding of more than £376,000.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Sir John Wheeler: In the last five years, 338 males and 773 females in the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office have applied for career breaks. Eleven of those individuals have had their employment terminated.

Framework Document

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he is yet in a position to announce the result of his Department's inquiry into who was responsible for leaking parts of the framework document to *The Times*; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: A senior member of the Northern Ireland Office who has had no previous involvement in the work of the joint framework document is conducting an inquiry into the source of the leak. A confidential report will be sent to the permanent under-secretary at the Northern Ireland Office upon completion of the inquiry and further action will be taken as necessary.

Punishment Beatings

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many punishment beatings have been recorded since the announcements of the ceasefires in 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: Since 31 August 1994 to 26 February 1995 there have been 88 punishment beatings recorded.

Prior Options Studies

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for a further programme of prior options studies to be undertaken by Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office.

Sir John Wheeler: I have decided, following an examination of the remaining executive activities being undertaken within the Northern Ireland civil service and the Northern Ireland Office, that prior options studies would be appropriate for each of the areas listed. These studies will determine for each area whether agency status or other options would be appropriate. Comments from interested parties will be welcome when commencement of the prior options studies is announced.

	Area	*Study completion date*
DANI	Forestry Service	December 1995
DANI	Agricultural Colleges	June 1996
DANI	Agricultural Development Service	June 1996
DANI	Veterinary Service	December 1996
DFP	Government Purchasing Service	May 1995
DFP	Recruitment	June 1995

In addition, the study previously announced of possible agency status for the superannuation branches of the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Health and Social Services will now be extended to embrace the teachers' superannuation branch of the Department of Education of Northern Ireland. The proposed completion date for this enlarged study is June 1995. A prior options study of the urban affairs area in the Department of the Environment was completed in December and is under consideration, and a prior options study of the Department of Economic Development's companies registry has been similarly completed. These two studies are in addition to those included in the announcement made on 18 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *521–22*.

ENVIRONMENT

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each site of special scientific interest for which development permission has been given *(a)* by a local authority and *(b)* by his Department

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department maintains no central record of planning permissions in sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times development permission on a site of special scientific interest has been refused by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* his Department, for each year since 1979.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department maintains no central record of planning permissions refused in sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many development plans on sites of special scientific interest have been refused by local authorities and consequently given permission on appeal to his Department, for each year since 1979.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department maintains no central record of planning permissions given on appeal in sites of special scientific interest.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list in rank order the metropolitan councils outside London showing the totals held in reserves at the latest available date;

(2) if he will list in rank order the London boroughs showing the totals held in reserves at the latest available date.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest available estimates of the level of reserves as at 1 April 1994 are given below. The authorities are ranked by order of reserves excluding those held by schools, non-LMS; schools' reserves are shown separately, LMS. The first column, "Non-LMS reserves", includes funds, which may be substantial, held for specified purposes which may not be available to the council for general use—for example, funds to finance capital projects to which the authority is committed; and insurance funds where the authority is bearing its own insurance risk. These estimates are subject to amendment as authorities finalise their accounts. Compatible data on the use of balances in 1994–95 which would be needed to derive an estimate of the level of reserves at 1 April 1995 are not yet available.

Estimated level of reserves at 1 April 1994

	Non-LMS £000	*LMS £000*
London boroughs		
Islington	–5,773	2,548
Brent	–214	4,545
Lewisham	1,278	7,993
Hounslow	2,576	4,884
Kingston upon Thames	2,694	1,803
Merton	2,717	2,441
Lambeth	3,050	450
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,948	2,390
Richmond upon Thames	4,205	2,116
Camden	4,690	4,757
Waltham Forest	5,284	5,330
Sutton	7,643	1,808
Bexley	7,704	4,699
Hillingdon	10,117	2,675
Greenwich	10,950	5,729
Tower Hamlets	11,911	4,200
Hackney	12,521	2,179
Havering	13,734	3,676
Haringey	14,332	4,312
Barnet	14,744	4,508
Southwark	15,152	2,723
Redbridge	15,417	3,385
Newham	18,505	4,695
Westminster	18,659	3,722
Harrow	22,191	2,699
Enfield	23,742	5,527
Kensington and Chelsea	24,231	1,382
Croydon	28,307	5,606
Ealing	40,891	2,791
Barking and Dagenham	41,766	3,136
Wandsworth	54,547	2,811
Bromley	74,093	3,154
City of London	204,706	73
Metropolitan districts		
Bradford	–2,139	12,287
Sefton	3,034	5,610
Wirral	3,992	3,687
Walsall	4,262	4,033
Tameside	4,977	1,303
North Tyneside	5,269	373
Knowsley	6,066	1,817
Manchester	7,253	2,912
Sheffield	7,326	5,014
St. Helens	7,932	4,262
Bury	8,000	2,225
Liverpool	8,337	9,486
South Tyneside	8,593	1,859
Doncaster	9,373	7,197
Wigan	9,774	4,197
Calderdale	10,045	2,311
Rochdale	10,582	211
Bolton	10,850	2,291
Stockport	11,183	2,613
Coventry	11,194	4,305
Wakefield	13,614	3,686
Rotherham	14,342	3,128
Salford	15,919	2,476
Gateshead	16,636	1,625
Wolverhampton	17,299	4,301
Solihull	19,218	4,581
Barnsley	19,412	3,081
Kirklees	21,833	4,214
Sandwell	23,093	5,756
Trafford	26,964	2,169
Dudley	27,066	1,493
Sunderland	29,592	2,053
Newcastle upon Tyne	31,659	4,271
Oldham	33,508	2,381
Leeds	41,207	4,728
Birmingham	89,526	16,696

Source:
Level of reserves (outturn) at 1/4/93 +/- appropriations to/withdrawals from reserves 1993–94 (RS return for 1993–94).

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to relax constraints on spending for local authorities and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Secretary of State announced his provisional capping criteria for local authorities on 1 February. He will announce his final criteria once authorities have set their budget requirements for 1995–96.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the value of reserves for the core cities of Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) to my hon. Friend, the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) earlier today. This provided data on the level of reserves held by each metropolitan district.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra finance would be available to local authorities in 1995–96 if the capping level for all local authorities was set at 3.2 per cent. above their 1994–95 budgets.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: If the capping limits for 1995–96 were set at 3.2 per cent. above local authorities' 1994–95 budgets—net of a local precepts and adjusted for various changes of function, boundary and financing—they would claw a little under £600 million of additional public expenditure compared to the cap limits implied by the current provisional capping criteria.

Government Cars (Palace of Westminster)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take to stop Government drivers within the Government car pool parking their vehicles with their engines running within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster.

Sir Paul Beresford: Government car service drivers are under clear instructions while parked within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster to keep their vehicles engines to a minimum consistent with passenger and security requirements. That instruction has been re-inforced recently by GCS management.

Coalfields Communities Campaign

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration was given to the attendance of his Ministers at the launch by the Coalfields Communities Campaign of its campaign on pollution of rivers by water from abandoned mine workings.

Mr. Atkins: The invitation to attend was given the usual careful consideration. We were aware of the views of the Coalfields Communities Campaign in its response to the consultation paper "Paying for our Past" and in subsequent correspondence.

Council House Sales, Westminster

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses were sold in each of the wards within the borough of Westminster in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Tables showing the available information on total council house sales for each English local authority for every financial year since 1979–80 and a cumulative total to March 1994 are in the Library.

Information about disposals at ward level is not collected by the Department.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he had made to the district auditor's interim report on Westminster city council's designated sales policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No response has been made. This is a matter for the local authority and its appointed auditor.

Ferro-Alloys Chimney (Emissions)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what have been the results of the monitoring that has been carried out by his Department of the emissions from the Ferro-Alloys chimney in Glossop, Derbyshire for the last 12 months for which figures are available, giving the average and maximum levels for each month.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has not carried out any monitoring itself. However, the company has supplied information about sulphur dioxide releases over the 12-month period to the end of February 1995. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is writing to the company to seek its consent to release this information, and I will be writing to the hon. Member.

Single-tier Local Authorities

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many single-tier local authorities have formally merged their housing and social services departments.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This information is not collected centrally.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the single regeneration budget has a designated fund for promoting the development of electronic village halls and cyber skills by local councils.

Mr. Curry: No.

Ms Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the ratio of the single regeneration budget to the housing association-approved development programme in *(a)* the west Midlands and *(b)* London; and what considerations underlie the variation between *(a)* and *(b)*.

Mr. Curry: Planned single regeneration budget expenditure for 1994–95 is some £175 million in the west midlands and £374 million in London. Allocations made at the start of 1994–95 from the Housing Corporation's approved development programme were some £126 million and £465 million respectively.

The ratios sought are thus (a) 1.4:1 and (b) 0.8:1. As the two programmes have different objectives, outputs and areas of operation there is no reason why there should be any relationship between these ratios.

Non-hazardous Waste

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) for what reason the planned European Commission timetable for the development of the proposed draft directive on the incineration of non-hazardous waste has been delayed beyond that originally proposed by Directorate General XI;

(2) what is the current status of the proposed draft EU directive on the incineration of non-hazardous waste; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations have been made by his Department regarding the lack of cost-benefit analysis contained in the draft EU proposal for a directive on the incineration of non-hazardous waste.

Mr. Atkins: The Commission tabled a first draft of this proposed directive in April 1994 and a second draft in August 1994. Three meetings of Government experts have been held, two of which included representatives of trade associations and environmental bodies, and there has also been a meeting of a technical sub-group. I believe that the Commission is currently considering the proposal in the light of the adoption last December of the hazardous waste incineration directive—94/67/EC—and the proposal for a directive on integrated pollution prevention and control.

My Department has made a number of written and verbal representations concerning the importance of assessing both costs and benefits in coming forward with proposals for new standards for non-hazardous waste incineration.

Housing Stock Transfers

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *132–36*, if he will publish a list

showing the date on which each local authority conducted a ballot on proposed large-scale voluntary transfer of their housing stock.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The 64 local authorities which have balloted tenants on proposed large-scale voluntary transfers are listed below, together with the month and the year in which each ballot took place.

Successful ballot results

Local authority	*Date of ballot*
Chiltern	September 1988
Sevenoaks	December 1988
Newbury	April 1989
South Wight	June 1989
Medina	July 1989
Rochester	July 1989
Swale	October 1989
North Bedfordshire	October 1989
Mid Sussex	December 1989
Broadland	January 1990
East Dorset	January 1990
South Buckinghamshire	July 1990
Tonbridge and Malling	July 1990
Ryedale	August 1990
Suffolk Coastal	November 1990
Christchurch	November 1990
Tunbridge Wells[1]	April 1991
	June 1991
Bromley	October 1991
East Cambridgeshire	April 1992
Surrey Heath	June 1992
Breckland	August 1992
West Dorset	October 1992
Hambleton	December 1992
Epson and Ewell	June 1993
Havant	June 1993
Hart	July 1993
Leominster	September 1993
South Ribble	October 1993
Hertsmere	October 1993
Penwith	October 1993
South Shropshire	November 1993
North Dorset	November 1993
Thanet	November 1993
Wychavon	November 1993
Mid Bedfordshire[2]	December 1993
Basingstoke and Deane[2]	April 1994
Windsor and Maidenhead[2]	June 1994
Vale of White Horse	June 1994
Maldon	July 1994
Malvern Hills	August 1994
Kennet	November 1994
Rushmoor	December 1994

[1] Held two consecutive ballots.
[2] Proposed split transfer to two housing associations. Two ballots held.

Unsuccessful ballot results

Local authority	*Date of ballot*
Torbay	October 1988
Rochford	November 1988
Salisbury	December 1988
Arun	January 1989
Three Rivers	March 1989
Canterbury	November 1989
Brentwood	November 1989
Redbridge	December 1989
Bournemouth	January 1990
Wokingham	April 1990
South Holland	July 1990
North Kesteven	December 1990
Hillingdon	July 1992

Unsuccessful ballot results

Local authority	*Date of ballot*
Kingston	August 1992
Woodspring	August 1992
Mendip	July 1993
Rother	October 1993
Westminster	October 1993
Maidstone[1]	November 1993
Poole[1]	November 1993
Thanet[1]	November 1993
Mid Bedfordshire[1]	December 1993
Cherwell[1]	April 1994
Castle Point	September 1994

[1] Proposed split transfer to two housing associations. Two ballots held.

Government Environmental Policy

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what role the meetings of all Green Ministers play in the integration of environmental considerations into all aspects of Government policy.

Mr. Atkins: Meetings of Green Ministers provide a valuable opportunity to discuss collectively aspects of environmental integration of common interest, such as energy conservation, environmental management and the forthcoming Environment White Paper. The meetings do not replace the individual responsibility of each Green Minister to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into the strategies and policies of his or her Department.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response was received to the consultation paper on arrangements for local taxation appeals and disputes in the event of a structural or boundary change in respect of any local government area in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The list of responses received has been placed in the Library of the House; copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Library. Regulations will be introduced shortly to give effect to the following measures to be applied in respect of all local taxation appeals and disputes in the event of a structural or boundary change:

if an authority has been abolished, and the corresponding listing officer, valuation officer or valuation tribunal ceases to exist, the case is to be handled by the successor bodies;

if the case has been listed for hearing by a valuation tribunal, and notice of the hearing has been served, or it has been agreed that it should be disposed of on the basis of written representations and notice thereof has been served, there is to be no change in arrangements;

in all other circumstances, the acquiring authority, listing officer, valuation officer and valuation tribunal, as the case may be, is to assume responsibility for the case; and

if the case relates in part to the period before the structural or boundary change, the relinquishing billing authority (if it elects to do so), listing officer and valuation officer should be a party to the proceedings.

Bathing Water Monitoring

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of recent incidents at Oxwich bay, Wales; and what plans he has

to increase the monitoring of viruses in bathing water as a result.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* An investigation, carried out by the West Glamorgan health authority, and published 28 February, concluded that there was no evidence of a link between illnesses and bathing or visiting Oxwich bay. I have no present plans to require increased monitoring of viruses in bathing waters.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what monitoring of viruses in Britain's bathing water is currently carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Monitoring for viruses in United Kingdom bathing waters is carried out in accordance with the EC bathing water directive. UK monitoring is the most extensive of any member state.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of viruses in sewage and chemical discharges on *(a)* human health and *(b)* bathing water quality.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* In January 1994, I announced and placed in the Library the results of a four-year study, funded by the Department of the Environment, the Department of Health, the Welsh Office and the National Rivers Authority, into health and bathing water quality. A detailed summary of the results of UK bathing water quality monitoring is placed in the Library each year. The results for 1994 were placed on 20 January 1995.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in how many instances water-borne viruses have been thought to be the cause of illness contracted by bathers in British waters in each of the last five years.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* I understand from the Department of Health that there is no conclusive evidence that any serious illness has been contracted by bathers in UK bathing waters during this period. The four-year study to assess the health risks of sea bathing published last year suggested that there is only a minimal risk of illness from British bathing waters.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest figure for reported benefit savings accrued by the Child Support Agency, giving in each case *(a)* the amount represented by pre-existing maintenance arrangements carried over by the Child Support Agency, *(b)* the amount represented by cases in which benefit ceased following action by the agency, *(c)* the amount represented by cases in which maintenance exceeds the amount of benefit payable and *(d)* the amount represented by consequential savings in council tax benefit and housing benefit.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 6 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the benefit savings scored by the Child Support Agency.

Benefit savings by category

	£ million
	1994–95
Existing maintenance agreements before CSA assessments	
Paid direct by absent parent to parent with care—existing	101.65
Paid through pre-Agency collection service—existing	6.96
Sub total	108.61
New maintenance as a result of CSA assessments	
Paid direct by absent parent to parent with care—new	10.48
Paid through Agency collection service to Secretary of State—new	32.45
Absent parent—Income Support deductions	1.55
Sub total	44.48
Benefit ceases following action by the Agency	
Non-maintenance cessations	165.95
Maintenance cessations	20.43
Sub total	186.38
Total	339.48

Savings arising from maintenance paid in Family Credit/DWA cases, and the consequential savings arising in Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit from cases where benefit has ceased are scored retrospectively after the end of the financial year, and figures are not currently available.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents with care at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have ceased to receive income support after receiving payments of child maintenance; and how many have ceased to receive income support and are receiving family credit after receiving child maintenance.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 7 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of parents with care (PWCs) who have ceased to claim income support (IS); or who have ceased to claim IS, but are receiving family credit (FC) after receiving child maintenance.

Agency centre	[1] [2] *PWCs no longer receiving is*
Belfast	1,688
Birkenhead	490
Dudley	1,176
Falkirk	1,186
Hastings	1,182
Plymouth	1,31[illegible]

[1] Year to date from April 1994 to January 1995.

[2] Child maintenance may not have been the only income received. Information is not available on the number of clients who have ceased to claim IS, but are receiving FC.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently employed by the Child Support Agency; and what was the figure in April 1993.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 7 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of staff employed by the Child Support Agency.

In April 1993, there were 2,937 established staff in the Agency. In addition there were 160 Northern Ireland civil servants based at the Child Support Agency Centre in Belfast who were engaged in work relating to parents with care who live in Great Britain.

In January 1995 there were 5,799 established staff in the Agency, and 645 Northern Ireland civil servants engaged in work relating to parents with care who live in Great Britain.

This increase in staffing reflects both the anticipated build up in staff, and the additional staff deployed as part of the recovery plan.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the basis for his estimate of the cost of taking account of travel-to-work costs in the child support formula.

Mr. Burt: The costs of the proposed allowance were estimated using data from the 1991 census about the distribution of distances travelled to work.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the cost of each of the proposed changes to the Child Support Agency referred to in his oral statement of 23 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns 19–21.

Mr. Burt: The cost, in terms of reduction in anticipated savings in benefit expenditure, of each of the proposed changes is estimated as follows:

	1995–96 £ million	*1996–97 £ million*	*1997–98 £ million*
Formula changes			
Property/capital settlements	5	10	10
Travel to work costs	10	15	20
Provision for full housing costs	5	10	10
Deferral of liability by eight weeks	10	10	10
30 per cent. cap on payments	10	10	10
Changes requiring primary legislation			
Departure orders	—	10	10
Maintenance credit	—	—	15
Totals	40	65	85

Note:
All figures in £ million, rounded to nearest £5 million.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the Child Support Agency to deal with all cases involving child maintenance; and if he will set out the Government's revised programme for the phased take-on of cases.

Mr. Burt: It was never the intention that the Child Support Agency would deal with all cases of child maintenance. Where there is a maintenance order in force with which both parents are content, and no benefit is being paid to the parent with care, the agency will not become involved.

Where such an order is currently in force, but one party is dissatisfied, the courts will continue to exercise jurisdiction until such time as the Child Support Agency takes over jurisdiction. This was intended to be in 1996, but the Government have announced plans to defer this date until the agency is in a position to take on the cases efficiently and to a high standard.

The agency expects to resume the take-on of those cases deferred as a result of the measures announced on 20 December 1994 by the end of 1995.

Lone Parents

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the Government's policy on encouraging all lone parents into employment and on providing incentives to that end; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: It is our policy to encourage lone parents to take up and stay in work. Improving work incentives is the most effective way of ensuring that lone parents leave benefit dependency; this offers the best long-term prospects for the families involved and produces savings for the public purse. Research indicates that most lone parents want to work. We have been very successful in encouraging lone parents to move from dependency on income support to work supplemented by family credit. In 1988, there was one working lone parent on family credit for every 10 on income support; by 1994, the proportion was almost one for every four.

In April 1992, we changed the qualifying hours of work for family credit from 24 hours to 16 hours a week. Currently, 120,000 lone parents work between 16 and 24 hours a week and receive family credit; many of these had previously been dependent on income support. Last October, we introduced the child care disregard to remove a stumbling block preventing some parents returning to work. This is worth up to £28 a week extra in family credit. In the long term, we expect that 150,000 families, mostly lone parents, will benefit from this change. The work incentives package announced last November includes measures to help people returning to work, such as the four-week extension of housing benefit, the national insurance contribution holiday for employers, and the back to work bonus. All of these will apply to lone parents and unemployed people. In January 1995, the child support White Paper announced a new scheme giving a credit for maintenance received by parents with care on income support. This scheme—the child maintenance bonus—will provide further help on returning to work through a lump sum of up to £1,000.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone mothers receive means-tested benefits; and what proportion of these are *(a)* never married, *(b)* separated wives, *(c)* divorced women and *(d)* widows and wives of pensioners.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the tables:

Table 1: Numbers of lone mothers in receipt of family credit, disability working allowance or income support in May 1993

Numbers in receipt of	*Total*
Family credit	200,000
Disability working allowance	—
Income support with no family credit or disability working allowance	987,000

Table 2: Numbers of lone parents in receipt of housing benefit/council tax benefit but not in receipt of family credit, disability working allowance or income support, in May 1993

Numbers in receipt of	*Total*
Housing benefit	46,000
Council tax benefit	44,000

Sources:
Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry May 1993.
Family Credit Statistical System. This is a 5 per cent. sample of awards made.
Disability Working Allowance Statistical System.
Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit MIS annual 1 per cent. sample.
Notes:
1. The figures refer to Great Britain and have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. There will be considerable overlap in table 2 as many cases receive both HB and CTB, but due to the collection procedure these cannot be identified.
3. For HB and CTB it is not possible to distinguish lone mothers from lone fathers. This information refers to lone parent rather than lone mother.

The marital status breakdown is only available for the income support data and is shown in the following table:

Table 3:

Marital status	*Total*
(a) never married	463,000
(b) separated	313,000
(c) divorced	192,000
(d) widowed	16,000

Source:
Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry May 1993.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), of 19 December 1994 *Official Report*, column *930*, if he will consider making some assessment of the ethnic origin of claimants who have failed the habitual residence test to check whether particular ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by the test.

Mr. Roger Evans: We have no plans to do so.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if a claimant can appeal against a Benefits Agency medical services doctor's failure to provide (i) a certificate under regulation 10(2)(e) and (ii) an opinion under regulation 27 of the Social Security (Incapacity For Work) (General) Regulations 1995.

Mr. Hague: A claimant cannot appeal against a Benefits Agency medical services doctor's failure to provide a certificate or opinion. He can appeal against an adjudication officer's decision on capacity for work. That decision will take into account whether the claimant is certified as being in an exempt category under regulation 10(2)(e), whether he has satisfied the all work test and whether any of the prescribed exceptional circumstances apply under regulation 27.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security at what intervals and on what basis a claimant of incapacity benefit will be re-tested after April 1995.

Mr. Hague: After the initial application of the all work test, a Benefits Agency medical services doctor will provide advice to the adjudication officer as to whether and, if so, at what interval, the question of the claimant's capacity should be reviewed. The interval will depend on the individual circumstances of each case.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he estimates will sign on as available for work pending an appeal against a decision that they are capable of work; and how many will claim income support.

Mr. Hague: No estimate has been made of the number of people who will choose to make themselves available for work pending an appeal. Estimated numbers expected to claim income support are not broken down between those appealing against a decision and those not making an appeal.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the number of people who will move from incapacity benefit and sign on as unemployed in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97; (iii) 1997–98.

Mr. Hague: The estimated number of people who will move from incapacity benefit, including new claimants after April 1995, and sign on as unemployed earlier than would otherwise have been the case, as a result of the new medical test, is as follows: 160,000 in 1995–96, 120,000 in 1996–97 and 60,000 in 1997–98. It is estimated that the average increase in the unemployment count as a result of the reform of incapacity benefit provision will be 90,000 in 1995–96, 195,000 in 1996–97 and 200,000 in 1997–98. These figures include people joining the unemployment count who will previously have been receiving income support with disability premium as well as those who will have been receiving incapacity benefit.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people who are expected to leave incapacity benefit in 1995–96 to sign on as unemployed he estimates will be aged *(a)* under 45 years, *(b)* between 45 and 54 years old, *(c)* 55 years or over; and how many in each category are estimated to receive an occupational or private pension amounting to (i) less than £35 per week, (ii) between £35 and £50 per week and (iii) between £50 and £75 per week;

(2) how many people who are expected to leave incapacity benefit in 1996–97 to sign on as unemployed he estimates will be aged *(a)* under 45 years, *(b)* between 45 and 54 years and, *(c)* 55 years or over; and how many in each category are estimated to receive an occupational or private pension amounting to (i) less than £35 per week, (ii) between £35 and £50 per week and (iii) between £50 and £75 per week.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of new claimants of both *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* severe disablement allowance who will (i) be found capable of work under the all work test and (ii) how many and what proportion he expects will lodge an appeal against this decision.

Mr. Hague: It is estimated that in 1995–96, approximately 45,000 and in subsequent years 55,000 new incapacity benefit claimants will be found capable of work earlier than would otherwise have been the case, as a result of the new medical test. It is estimated that 60 per cent. of these claimants will appeal against the decision of capacity for work. No estimates have been made of the number of new severe disablement allowance claimants expected to be found capable of work.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the number and proportion of appeals against a decision of capacity for work which are frivolous.

Mr. Hague: None.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he consulted (i) the Independent Tribunal Service, (ii) the Council on Tribunals and (iii) the Social Security Advisory Committee about the benefit reduction for people appealing against a decision that they are capable of work.

Mr. Roger Evans: The Secretary of State referred the proposed income support regulations to the Social Security Advisory Committee under section 172(1) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 on 3 and 16 February 1995. The Social Security Advisory Committee agreed on 16 February 1995, under section 173(1)(b) of the same Act, that the regulations need not be formally referred to it.

There is no statutory requirement in these circumstances to consult either the Independent Tribunal Service or the Council on Tribunals.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on 30 January 1995 *Official Report,* column *520,* if the normal control dates based on form MF213 will be the basis for reviewing the estimated 220,000 people who will fail the new incapacity test.

Mr. Hague: Under the existing invalidity benefit system, when a claim is considered by the Benefits Agency medical services—the doctor gives advice on if and when the case should be reviewed. In cases with a review date, the new all-work test will be applied for the purpose of the first planned review after 13 April this year. We expect that all such cases will be reviewed in the first two years of the new benefit. The remaining cases will then also be reviewed under the new test.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of weeks between the date an appeal was lodged against a decision that a person is capable of work to the date of the hearing.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the average clearance time for all invalidity benefit appeals in the quarter ending June 1994 was 26.6 weeks.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of housing benefit claimants are currently in receipt of additional help with rent under regulation 11(3) of the Housing Benefit General Regulations.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not held centrally.

National Insurance Credits

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if people claiming income support pending an appeal against a decision that they are capable of work will be credited for national insurance purposes for the period between lodging an appeal and the hearing.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ensure that credits are available for the period pending an appeal against a decision that a person is capable of work, he should register as available for employment. If he fails to do this, incapacity credits will be awarded only for the period if his appeal succeeds.

Registering as available for employment will not prejudice the outcome of his appeal.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (i) what assessment his Department has made of the implications for income support claimants of the changes to income support mortgage interest to be implemented in October 1995;

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the impact on the rate of repossession of the changes to income support for mortgage interest to be implemented in October 1995;

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* monthly and *(b)* annual repossessions that will arise from October 1995 as a result of the Government's reduction in help for unemployed home owners.

Mr. Roger Evans: We believe that our proposals will result in the development of comprehensive quality insurance and will provide better protection for all home owners, not just those who currently get help from income support mortgage interest.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated additional housing costs *(a)* to local authorities in England and Wales and *(b)* to housing associations in England and Wales of the changes to income support for mortgage interest to be implemented in October 1995.

Mr. Roger Evans: There should not be any additional housing costs of this nature.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in receipt of income support for mortgage interest payments had their homes repossessed in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* each of the five preceding years.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the percentage of private rented

sector tenants who are currently in receipt of housing benefit in each local authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available. It is estimated that the proportion of tenants of private landlords who receive housing benefit in England is 49 per cent. and 61 per cent. in Wales.

Source: Housing Benefit Management Information Statistics February 1994 and Housing and Construction Statistics September 1994.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 8 March 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years, and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No permanent secretary has left the Lord Chancellor's Department's employment in the last five years.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many men and women applied for career breaks in his Department; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Details of how many men and women applied for a career break within the last five years were not recorded centrally until July 1994. Since then 20 applications have been made, two of which were refused. None of the 20 have had their employment terminated.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service (Market Testing)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what evidence he has in support of the conclusion of the White Paper on the future of the civil service that market testing has created savings.

Mr. Horam: The evidence can be found in the "Market Testing Bulletin Special Report", published in January, which is available in the Library. The report includes full details of the results of the "Competing for Quality" programme—including market testing—to September 1994 and shows that Departments have now identified annual cost savings of over £400 million from a programme covering over £2 billion of Government services.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. David Hunt: In the five years from 1 March 1990, Sir Peter Kemp KCB, has left this Department's employment as a permanent secretary, and Sir Peter Graham KCB QC and Sir Constant Henry de Waal, KCB, QC have left as first parliamentary counsels.

Sir Peter Kemp has been subsequently appointed as a part-time commissioner with the Audit Commission.

Women's Unit

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many staff are employed in the development unit for women in science and engineering located within the office of Science and Technology; what are its aims and objectives; and for how many years its funding is guaranteed.

Mr. Horam: The development unit on women in science, engineering and technology has a staff of two plus administrative support; its aims and objectives are outlined in the Government's response to the "Rising Tide" report; and its future will be reviewed after an initial period of two years.

Technology Foresight

30. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what practical benefits to British industry have arisen from the technology foresight initiative.

Mr. David Hunt: Many—in particular in the medium to longer term.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

BBC

Mr. Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the current calculation of the amount of money that the BBC will reallocate to the regions and what percentage that will be of the present level of spending on network productions.

Mr. Dorrell: The BBC last year published plans for a gradual reallocation of expenditure on network production to regions outside London and south east England. This will be worth an additional £75 million a year by 1997–98, and represents an increase of 48 per cent. over 1993-94 expenditure of £155 million.

Historic Government Buildings

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to improve the care of historic Government buildings.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government committed themselves in 1992 to a nine-point plan for the care of historic buildings on their own estate. This provides for regular inspection and maintenance of these buildings and an annual report by my Department's conservation unit on their condition. I am today publishing, for the first time, the conservation unit's report.

I am also issuing today new guidance to Departments on the disposal of surplus historic buildings. This follows from the "Efficiency Scrutiny of the Management of the Government Estate," published last year, which identified the need for guidance on the particular considerations arising in respect of the disposal of historic properties,

over and above those applying to disposals generally. The main emphasis of the guidance is that "best price" should not be the overriding concern when considering the disposal of a building. Rather, Departments should aim to obtain the best return for the taxpayer that is consistent with Government policies for the protection of historic buildings and areas.

I am placing copies of both documents in the Library.

Pink Pound

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the significance of the pink pound to Britain's tourism and leisure industry.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last three years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Dorrell: Mr. Hayden Phillips was appointed as permanent secretary to my Department when it was created in April 1992. Mr. Phillips is still in post.

ITV Companies

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information he collects on the amounts ITV companies are spending on new British programmes and on dividends to shareholders.

Mr. Dorrell: Such information is not collected by Government. These are commercial matters for ITV companies, acting within the terms of their licences.

Planning and Management Systems

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what system of planning and management information systems is currently in place in his Department; and what documents pertaining to it are available to *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* the public.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department prepares internal business and forward management plans, and the many bodies which my Department funds produce business and strategic plans, some of which are published. The DNH annual report, containing the Department's expenditure plans, is prepared each year as part of the series of departmental reports presented to Parliament. It is published and available to the public through HMSO bookshops.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what changes he is making to his Department's planning and management information systems in the light of the fundamental expenditure review of the Department and the recommendations of the multi-departmental efficiency scrutiny of such systems.

Mr. Dorrell: Neither of these reviews has yet reported. I will consider any action I wish to take when they do so.

Children's Play

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he intends to announce plans for a national framework for children's play.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Eltham, (Mr. Bottomley) on 2 March, *Official Report,* column *640.*

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to fund the National Voluntary Council for Children's Play in 1995–96.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department currently has no budget for children's play. I understand that the NVCCP has submitted an application to the Sports Council's Trust Company for an extension of its present grant into the 1995–96. In relation to funding for children's play from October 1995, I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 2 March, *Official Report,* column *640.*

National Lottery

Ms Lynne : To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money will be made available from national lottery funds to sports clubs, including football clubs.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Twenty per cent. of the net proceeds from the national lottery will be made available to sport and distributed through the four national sports councils. This amount currently stands at around £48 million. It will be for the sports councils themselves to decide which projects should receive funding, based on the applications they receive.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which listed buildings in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland are deemed eligible for financial assistance towards the cost of renovation by Historic Scotland from moneys obtained from the national lottery; what criteria are used to assess such applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Repairs to historic buildings throughout the United Kingdom are eligible for lottery funding directly from the National Heritage Memorial fund—NHMF—if they fulfil the criteria set down within the "Guidelines for Applicants to the Heritage Lottery Fund" published by the trustees of the NHMF, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Repairs to historic buildings within the care of Historic Scotland itself are similarly eligible for lottery funding from the NHMF.

Scratch Lottery

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made on the impact of the income of football pools and society lotteries on the introduction by Camelot of a scratch lottery.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* National lottery instant win games have not yet been introduced. It will be for the football pools companies and the promoters of society lotteries, in the first instance, to assess any impact which the introduction of such games may have on their income.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* In the last month Ministers in my Department have received one such item of correspondence.

Works of Art

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art during the half year ended 31 December, specifying in each case the valuation and whether any item was exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; and if he will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* The information is as follows:-

Description of item	*Valuation* £	*Outcome*
A drawing 'Two Horsemen Fighting' dated 1620-30 by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Il Guercino	147,807	Export licence granted.
The Narcissus Washstand designed by William Burges c. 1865–67	250,000	Acquired by the Cecil Higgins Trust.
An autograph working manuscript of 21 keyboard pieces, by Henry Purcell, c. 1680–1690	281,137.50	Acquired by the Trustees of the British Library.
A ceremonial bronze dirk, middle Bonze Age 1500–1350 BC, from Oxborough, Norfolk	52,050	Acquired by the Trustees of the British Museum.
A carved Narwhal ivory horn from the mid 12th century	448,762.50	Decision further deferred until after 18 March 1995.
A painting, 'The Painter's Room', by Lucien Freud, dated 1943	515,812.50	Decision deferred until after 1 April 1995.
An arithmetical Rotula	46,462.50	Under consideration by the Secretary of State.
The Stanhope Calculator	247,612.50	Under consideration by the Secretary of State.
Materials relating to Stanhope's Demonstrator	46,462.50	Under consideration by the Secretary of State.
A sculpture by Henry Moore, 'Head and Shoulders' (1927–28)	475,000	Decision deferred until after 6 April 1995.
A bust of Thomas Hollis by Joseph Wilton, c. 1700	400,000	Export licence granted.
A painting, 'Daniel and Cyrus before the Idol Bel' by Rembrandt, dated 1633	4,800,000	Export licence granted.
A drawing, 'Samson and Delilah' by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Il Guercino	76,425.82	Export licence granted.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Howard: Sir Clive Whitmore retired from the Home Office as permanent secretary within the period covered by the question. He has not been appointed to any position by Ministers.

Mr. John Shaw

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to respond to Mr. John Shaw of 33 Bellpit close, Worsley in the matter of pension entitlement from Crown service overseas.

Mr. Howard: It has not been possible to trace any correspondence from Mr. John Shaw on the matter of pension entitlement from Crown service overseas. I have asked my officials to write to Mr. Shaw asking him to write in again, or to send a copy of his original letter, and the matter will then receive early attention.

Offenders in the Community

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to publish the 1995 "National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in the Community".

Mr. Howard: I shall publish tomorrow the 1995 "National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in the Community" jointly with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Wales and simultaneously will place copies in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total annual cost to public funds of housing in detention all those seeking asylum.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information does not identify separately those costs which relate to asylum seekers.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the cost per detainee per year for each of the establishments in which those who are seeking asylum in the United Kingdom are detained.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The overall cost of detaining a person in detention accommodation for which the Immigration Service is responsible is currently estimated at £540 per week including full Immigration Service staffing costs. This would equate to £28,080 in a year but

detention for this period would be most unusual. Figures for individual centres are not kept separately. Some people are detained under powers in the Immigration Act 1971 in Prison Service establishments, where the average cost per place in 1993–94 was £411 per week—£21,372 per year—but these figures exclude headquarters staffing costs.

Ethnic Minorities (Police)

Mr. Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the relationship between black people and the police; and what plans he has to improve it.

Mr. Maclean: The police service and the Government are committed to developing positive relationships between the police and all sections of the community, including minority ethnic groups. Measures taken to meet the needs of these communities include a statutory requirement for consultation with the community; the introduction of ethnic monitoring of police activity; the establishment of the inter-departmental racial attacks group and other activities in police forces to deal with racial violence; provision of a range of training in community and race relations; force recruitment campaigns aimed at encouraging ethnic minority candidates to apply to join the police; and improved grievance procedures against allegations of discrimination within police forces.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many court reports were completed by the north east London probation service during 1992 and 1993;

(2) how many offenders were supervised by the north east London probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 28 February 1995 (column *539*).

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are employed and at what grade by the north east London probation service on 30 June 1992, 30 June 1993 and 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 6 March 1995 at column *31*.

Combat 18

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what evidence he has of the activities of Combat 18 amongst supporters of Chelsea football club;

(2) what assessment he has made of the role of the British National party and Combat 18 in the disturbances in Bruges on 27 and 28 February.

Mr. Maclean: Responsibility for gathering information about extremist organisations and their members, and for the investigation of specific criminal offences, rests with the police. I understand from the police that there is no evidence that Combat 18 is itself involved amongst the supporters of Chelsea football club, although some of those who associate with the supporters may have sympathies with this group. Neither is there evidence to suggest that the BNP or Combat 18 were involved in the disturbances in Bruges on 27 and 28 February.

Dangerous Dogs Act

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Dangerous Dogs Act is kept under continuing review in the light of how it works, including consideration of the points made in the private Peer's Bill currently before another place.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the section 11 allocations made for each local authority in 1994–95.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Allocations to individual authorities are subject to adjustment from time to time in the light of a change in circumstances—for example, when a school or college opts to set up a separate project. The following table shows the current allocations for the 1994–95 financial year.

Authority	*Home Office cash allocations*
Avon	615,251
Barking and Dagenham	230,860
Barnet	748,243
Bedfordshire	2,361,022
Berkshire	1,053,875
Bexley	100,138
Birmingham	4,035,694
Blackburn	49,539
Bolton	880,505
Bradford	4,204,150
Brent	1,742,385
Buckinghamshire	1,095,250
Burnley	18,774
Bury	354,547
Calderdale	853,361
Cambridgeshire	976,563
Camden	1,111,346
Cardiff	7,888
Cheshire	73,862
Cleveland	479,638
Coventry	2,108,375
Croydon	949,775
Derbyshire	1,046,415
Devon	11,949
Doncaster	100,338
Dudley	877,198
Durham	119,090
Ealing	2,615,675
East Sussex	139,412
Enfield	1,058,164
Essex	25,755
Gateshead	22,732
Gloucester	28,983
Gloucestershire	265,008
Greenwich	1,329,673
Gwent	192,662
Hackney	3,147,620
Hammersmith	713,289
Hampshire	558,367
Haringey	2,604,874
Harrow	556,992
Havering	36,169
Hereford and Worcester	175,235
Hertfordshire	1,492,311
Hillingdon	317,055
Hounslow	1,389,502
Humberside	275,863
Hyndburn	17,860

Authority	Home Office cash allocations
Islington	1,434,673
Kensington and Chelsea	899,845
Kent	1,095,957
Kingston	105,071
Kirklees	2,394,143
Lambeth	1,085,102
Lancashire	4,629,966
Leeds	1,725,338
Leicester	115,597
Leicestershire	3,013,512
Lewisham	1,637,467
Lincolnshire	61,319
Liverpool	165,185
London Boroughs Grants Unit	123,071
Manchester	2,225,999
Merton	490,246
Newcastle	303,140
Newham	2,181,976
Norfolk	68,285
Northamptonshire	663,758
North Tyneside	115,586
North Yorkshire	49,312
Nottingham	61,435
Nottinghamshire	1,519,199
Oldham	1,909,961
Oxford	3,322
Oxfordshire	684,260
Preston	12,834
Redbridge	918,005
Redditch	12,971
Richmond	56,225
Rochdale	1,193,213
Rotherham	327,313
St. Albans	18,105
St. Helens	14,043
Salford	47,498
Sandwell	1,228,775
Scunthorpe	16,103
Sheffield	1,697,662
Shropshire	84,104
Southampton	11,422
Southwark	1,955,157
South Glamorgan	444,978
South Yorkshire FCDA	12,751
Staffordshire	924,043
Stockport	76,079
Suffolk	237,235
Sunderland	87,284
Surrey	291,845
Sutton	46,902
Tameside	585,940
Tower Hamlets	6,826,782
Trafford	242,981
Wakefield	296,729
Walsall	1,579,939
Waltham Forest	1,585,015
Wandsworth	1,369,800
Warwickshire	785,021
West Midlands FCDA	65,241
Westminster	1,498,548
West Sussex	212,623
West Yorkshire FCDA	95,651
Wigan	44,078
Wiltshire	121,565
Wirral	75,839
Wolverhampton	1,575,008

Intoxicating Substances

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought in each year since the passing of the Intoxicating Substances Supply Act 1985; and how many have been successful.

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1985 to 1993 is given in the table. 1994 data will not be available until the autumn 1995.

Number of prosecutions and convictions under the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985[1], 1985–1993

England and Wales

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Prosecutions	—	6	15	7	12	7	8	5	5
Convictions	—	2	11	4	9	4	6	3	3

[1] Came into force August 1985.

Data Protection

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish the compliance cost assessment for the draft data protection directive as it applies to the United Kingdom *(a)* as regards the 1992 draft and *(b)* the draft agreed at the latest Council of Minsters meeting;

(2) if he will state the categories of paper records to which the draft data protection directive now applies; and what estimate he has made of the costs which this provision will impose on British businesses.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A paper showing the results of a survey of the estimated cost of implementing the 1992 draft of the directive in the United Kingdom has been made publicly available. A copy of this paper was placed in the Library of the House last year. We have as yet made no estimate of the cost of implementing the present draft of the directive, although the improvements made to the directive, as set out in my reply to my hon. Friend on 23 February at column *332*, mean that the costs involved are now likely to be significantly lower.

In its application to paper records, the draft directive covers personal data which form or are intended to form part of a filing system. Within certain parameters, it is for member states to decide what constitutes a filing system for the purposes of applying the directive. Determining the precise definition to use, in consultation with business and other interests which will be affected, will be an important part of the process of implementing the directive.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy

of the good practice guidelines to local authorities and police authorities on the use of closed circuit television in public places.

Mr. Maclean: A copy of the Home Office publication "CCTV—Looking Out for You" has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the home Department if he will list *(a)* all local authorities and *(b)* all police authorities, indicating joint ventures, operating closed circuit television schemes in public places and give the total capital cost per scheme and annual operating cost per scheme.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally. A list of some towns believed to be operating CCTV schemes is included at appendix 2 to the Home Office guidance booklet "CCTV—Looking Out for You", but it is not necessarily comprehensive. Costs are a matter for the individual operators. I have arranged for a copy of the booklet to be sent to the hon. Member.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of all Home Office research projects examining the effectiveness of CCTV in public places in reducing crime levels indicating the institution, research body or individual responsible for the project, the cost per project and date of completion or expected date of completion.

Mr. Maclean: The information is contained in the following table.

Research Project/Publication	*Institution/Research body/Author*	*Cost*	*Date of completion*
The Impact of Closed Circuit Television on Crime in the London Underground—Home Office Research Study No. 49	Home Office; Research and Planning Unit	Not available	1978
Close Circuit Television in Public Places—Crime Prevention Unit Paper No. 35	T. Honess and E. Charman of Michael and Associates, Cardiff, for the Home Office Police Research Group	£48,376	Summer 1992
Before and after research into the effectiveness of CCTV within Birmingham city centre	T. Honess and E. Charman of Michael and Associates, Cardiff, for the Home Office Police Research Group	£20,536	results to be published Summer 1995
Understanding public car parks, crime and CCTV: evaluation lessons from Safer Cities—Crime Prevention Unit Paper No. 42	Nick Tilley of Nottingham University, consultant to the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit	£12,000	1993
Town centre CCTV schemes: four case studies	Home Office Police Research Group	£10,000	Summer 1995
Effectiveness of CCTV security systems	Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch	£200,000 over 5 years	April 1997

Overseas Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions take place when an overseas prisoner sentenced for crimes committed in the United Kingdom is returned to his country of origin to complete the remainder of his sentence as to the date of the release of such a person from prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 8 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the consultation that takes place concerning prisoners' release dates when prisoners are returned to their country of origin to complete their sentences.

The transfer of prisoners between the United Kingdom and other jurisdictions is governed by the Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984 and international agreements. These require that both jurisdictions concerned and the prisoner seeking repatriation, consent to any transfer. In considering repatriation requests made by prisoners here, the foreign jurisdiction is required to provide information as to how the remaining balance of a prisoner's sentence would be administered and release determined following transfer. If both jurisdictions then consent to the prisoner's transfer, this information is communicated to the prisoner in seeking his or her consent. A prisoner transferred to a foreign jurisdiction receives full credit for all time spent in custody here relating to completion of sentence prior to the transfer, including any remand time. Following transfer, the remaining balance of time to serve attracts the early release arrangements of the foreign jurisdiction.

Videos

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the sale of videos giving instructions on the use of explosives and on techniques for killing humans; and what response he has given.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has received three letters from Members of Parliament and two letters from the public in the last 12 months about the supply of instructional videos that show the use of explosives and criminal techniques. Under the Video Recordings Act 1984 these works were exempt from classification by the British Board of Film Classification—BBFC—and their unclassified supply was not therefore unlawful. We have, however, taken action in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to ensure that all video works which depict techniques likely to be useful in the commission of offences or, which to any significant extent, depict criminal activity which is likely to any significant extent to stimulate or encourage the commission of offences, are subject to classification by the BBFC. The BBFC may of course withhold a

classification certificate should it consider it appropriate to do so, particularly bearing in mind the statutory criteria set out in the Act which the board has to take into account when classifying works. Once the relevant provisions come into force anyone supplying a work in respect of which a certificate has been refused would be liable to prosecution.

Private Clegg

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *223*, if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which a journalist interviewed Private Clegg at Wakefield prison using an assumed name; and what actions he is taking to prevent such incidents taking place.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 8 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what action has been taken following the interview of Private Lee Clegg at Wakefield prison by a journalist.

Mr. Clegg's visitors are now required to produce satisfactory evidence of their identity before they are allowed to visit him.

Market Testing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the market testing exercise in connection with his Department's data processing work.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The estimated cost of conducting the market test of the Home Office's administrative information technology services division was £1,565,000. Estimated average annual savings arising from this market test are about £4.8 million or a saving of about 30 per cent. of the cost of comparable IT services under the former arrangements.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to privatise the police national computer; if he will list those bodies with whom he has recently discussed this topic; and what assessment he has made of *(a)* the advantages and *(b)* the disadvantages of privatising the computer.

Mr. Maclean: There are no plans for the privatisation of the police national computer—PNC2—which is housed at the Hendon data centre. But the Government continue to believe that it will in the longer term be beneficial to market test the operation of the police national computer service, with a view to contracting out its delivery while maintaining the ownership, control, and use of the records it contains in the hands of the police service. For the reasons given in my reply to a question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 8 February at columns *254–55*, the current market test of the Hendon data centre will not proceed to competitive tendering at present. The position will be reviewed in about 18 months' time, when the requirement for the third generation computer—PNC3—which will eventually replace the current installation, becomes clearer.

Recent discussions on these matters have been held with the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland), and the local authority associations under the aegis of the tripartite Police Information Services Board, which is the management board for the police national computer; and further discussions with the Hendon data centre trade union side have been arranged.

Data Processing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the ongoing cost to his Department of monitoring the current costs relating to the contract for his Department's data processing work.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The total costs of managing the contract for information technology services provided by Sema Group plc are about £420,000 a year. They reflect the separation of purchaser and provider roles in the Department and would have been incurred whoever had won the market test for information technology services. Estimated average annual savings arising from this market test are about £4.8 million or a saving of about 30 per cent. of the cost of comparable IT services under the former arrangements.

Warwickshire Police Authority

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria were used by him to assess the suitability of members of the new Warwickshire police authority when he considered the deletion of names from the list supplied to him.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* I exercised my judgment as to who were the best candidates for appointment using the criteria of the qualities listed in the information for applicants for these appointments: good communication and financial skills; the ability to challenge accepted views in a constructive way; the ability to represent a wide range of people in the community and have an understanding of their policing needs and the pressure and challenges which face the police themselves; and possession of skills and experience which would broaden the expertise available to the police authority.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many names he himself deleted from the list supplied by the local nominating panel for the new Warwickshire police authority.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* Ten.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with whom he consulted about deleting any of the names supplied by the nominating panel for the new Warwickshire police authority; and with which hon. Members he held discussions about the nominations to the Warwickshire police authority.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The Home Office Whip was consulted. Ministers did not hold discussions with any hon. Members.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many names were supplied to him by the nominating panel for the new Warwickshire police authority; and how many he deleted from the list.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The selection panel for Warwickshire police authority supplied 20 names to me, which I reduced to ten for further consideration by the councillor and magistrate members of the authority.

Police Statistics

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilians are currently serving in constabularies in (i) England and Wales and (ii) each constabulary in the east midlands; and how many were serving in 1979.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Information on those police forces in which I understand the hon. Member is interested is set out in the table. Information on England and Wales was given in the reply to his question on 1 March at column *575*.

I Police officer strength

Forces	[1]*1979*	[1]*1994*
Derbyshire	1,757	1,793
Leicestershire	1,701	1,838
Lincolnshire	1,167	1,208
Northamptonshire	926	1,171
Nottinghamshire	2,125	2,331

[1] As at 31 December.

II Civilian staff strength

Forces	[1]*1979*	[1]*1994*
Derbyshire	646	624
Leicestershire	362	687
Lincolnshire	312	504
Northamptonshire	249	464
Nottinghamshire	535	870

[1] As at 31 December.

ENVIRONMENT

Birds

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the number of applications his Department received for the sale of birds listed in appendix 1 of CITES and appendix C1 of EC regulation 3626/82, and how many such birds were sold in the last year for which figures are available;

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the number of bird species and the number of individual birds currently held in captivity in the United Kingdom which are listed in appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, and appendix C1 of EC regulation 3626/82.

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1994 my Department received 1,276 individual applications to sell specimens of bird species listed on appendix I of CITES, or annex C1 of EC regulation 3626/82. Exemptions were subsequently issued permitting the sale of 1,958 birds. My Department has no estimate of the number of species or specimens in this category which are currently held in captivity.

Westminster City Council

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he last met the officers and the councillors of Westminster city council to discuss the district auditor's interim report.

(2) when he or any of his predecessors have met the hon. member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) and the right hon. member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) to discuss *(a)* Westminster city council's designated sales policy and *(b)* the district auditor's report on the designated sales policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: So far as I am aware, no such meetings have taken place. These are matters for the local authority and their appointed auditor.

Stellar's Sea Eagle

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the number of licences his Department has issued in each of the past two years for the importation of Stellar's sea eagle; if he will indicate the countries of origin and whether the birds were captive-bred; and if he will list the criteria that have to be met before a licence can be issued for the importation of Stellar's sea eagle.

Sir Paul Beresford: In the last two years my Department has issued one permit allowing the import of two specimens of Stellar's sea eagle. The birds were taken from the wild in Russia.

The criteria that have to be satisfied before an import permit can be issued are set out in article III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and are that:

the import will be for purposes which are not detrimental to the survival of the species involved;

the proposed recipient of a living specimen is suitably equipped to house and care for it; and

the specimen is not to be used for primarily commercial purposes.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects the case of Southport to be referred to and considered by the Local Government Commission;

(2) when he expects those metropolitan areas which have expressed a strong desire for a change in the structure of local government to be referred to and considered by the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We intend to consider directing the commission to conduct boundary reviews of metropolitan areas alongside, and in the light of, any individual district structure reviews that may be required following my right hon. Friend's announcement on 2 March, *Official Report*, col. 1183.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was allocated to the educational components of the single regeneration budget in the successful local authority bids; and what he estimates to be the change in level of funding for section type projects transferred to the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: Some 135 of the 201 approved bids from successful single regeneration budget partnerships are expected to include educational components. The SRB provides flexible financial support towards the overall

cost of approved schemes. The amount of money likely to be spent on particular components, of what are generally multi-faceted bids, is therefore not available.

The Government are providing £83 million in 1995–96 across the country for new and existing schemes under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 which assist minority ethnic communities overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. All the projects transferred to the single regeneration budget will continue to be funded for their planned lifetimes.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an announcement about the spending plans of his Department, Ordnance Survey and the Office of Water Services for the years 1995–96 to 1997–98.

Mr. Gummer: Yes. I have today published the Department of the Environment's annual report for 1995. This sets out in detail the outcome of the public expenditure survey announced in the November 1994 Budget Statement as it affects the areas of my responsibility. The report provides an overview of how my Department, Ordnance Survey and Ofwat have discharged their functions over the past year. It provides background to each spending programme and sets out our plans for the future.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will set out the amounts of the council tax which are currently owing to the Harrogate borough council and each of the other district councils in North Yorkshire.

(2) if he will set out the amounts of community charge which are currently owing to the Harrogate borough council and each of the other district councils in North Yorkshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information on uncollected community charge and council tax for each local authority is not available centrally. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regularly publish estimates for individual authorities: figures for 31 March 1994 are available in its "Revenue Collection Statistics 1993–94" publication and are as follows:

	Community charge arrears (£000)	*Council tax arrears (£000)*
Craven	752	302
Hambleton	618	467
Harrogate	4,288	1,261
Richmondshire	1,234	254
Ryedale	671	413
Scarborough	2,144	2,811
Selby	n/a	n/a
York	2,783	866

The figures for Selby were not published by CIPFA.

Mr. Rendell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the assumed rate of interest for 1995–96 in respect of local authorities' assumed interest receipts; and what were the corresponding figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95;

(2) what is the control total for the interest receipts element of the standard spending assessments for 1995–96;

(3) what is the assumed amount of interest receipts for each county council for 1995–96; and what were the corresponding figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Interest receipts appear in both the all other services and the capital financing SSA elements. The former element includes allowance for interest which local authorities might earn on cash balances, reserves and usable receipts; the latter an allowance for interest which could be earned on reserved receipts—the portion of a capital receipt which has to be set aside as provision for credit liabilities.

Table 1 shows the interest rates used for each SSA element for 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96, together with the national control totals. Table 2 shows the assumed amounts for each county council.

Table 1—Interest rates and control totals

	Interest receipts element in the All Other Services block		*Interest receipts element in the Capital Financing block*	
	Notional interest rate Per cent.	*National control total £ million*	*Notional interest rate Per cent.*	*National control total £ million*
1993–94	10.4	–525.8	9.9	–301.0
1994–95	5.9	–432.4	9.2	222.0
1995–96	5.4	–351.0	9.1	–237.0

The interest rate used for the interest receipts element in the all other services block is the average LIBOR short-term interest rate. The rate used for the capital financing element is an average of short and long-term interest rates.

Table 2: Interest receipt SSA elements for County Councils

	All other services block			*Capital Financing block*		
Local Authority	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*	*1995–96 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*	*1995–96 £ million*
Avon	-7.410	-6.027	-4.446	-0.757	-0.840	-0.865
Bedfordshire	-4.761	-3.881	-2.844	-0.470	-0.513	-0.525
Berkshire	-6.176	-5.054	-3.786	-0.760	-0.828	-0.859
Buckinghamshire	-5.419	-4.486	-3.248	-0.847	-0.920	-0.934

Table 2: Interest receipt SSA elements for County Councils

	All other services block			Capital Financing block		
Local Authority	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*	*1995–96 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*	*1995–96 £ million*
Cambridgeshire	-5.084	-4.221	-3.165	-0.694	-0.772	-0.797
Cheshire	-7.498	-6.160	-4.597	-0.947	-1.058	-1.128
Cleveland	-5.272	-4.262	-3.125	-0.661	-0.730	-0.761
Cornwall	-3.664	-3.040	-2.308	-0.586	-0.643	-0.658
Cumbria	-3.945	-3.221	-2.365	-0.531	-0.595	-0.619
Derbyshire	-7.040	-5.831	-4.340	-1.010	-1.116	-1.114
Devon	-7.944	-6.526	-4.947	-0.986	-1.096	-1.132
Dorset	-4.797	-3.943	-2.995	-0.612	-0.678	-0.689
Durham	-4.844	-4.072	-2.995	-0.595	-0.667	-0.684
East Sussex	-5.524	-4.529	-3.421	-0.768	-0.853	-0.910
Essex	-12.594	-10.523	-7.729	-1.559	-1.697	-1.745
Gloucestershire	-4.050	-3.289	-2.482	-0.563	-0.627	-0.657
Hampshire	-12.037	-9.909	-7.285	-1.529	-1.697	-1.795
Hereford and Worcester	-5.040	-4.151	-3.105	-0.569	-0.621	-0.633
Hertfordshire	-7.978	-6.658	-5.164	-0.843	-0.915	-0.930
Humberside	-7.400	-5.998	-4.439	-0.985	-1.086	-1.106
Kent	-12.842	-10.590	-7.852	-1.772	-2.010	-2.221
Lancashire	-11.543	-9.466	-7.017	-1.615	-1.765	-1.816
Leicestershire	-7.348	-5.942	-4.428	-0.969	-1.052	-1.068
Lincolnshire	-4.723	-3.868	-2.868	-0.599	-0.671	-0.711
Norfolk	-5.713	-4.724	-3.503	-0.669	-0.749	-0.781
Northamptonshire	-4.792	-3.843	-2.875	-0.667	-0.720	-0.729
Northumberland	-2.327	-1.958	-1.582	-0.319	-0.362	-0.389
North Yorkshire	-5.251	-4.336	-3.282	-0.690	-0.776	-0.812
Nottinghamshire	-8.342	-6.741	-4.986	-0.821	-0.909	-0.915
Oxfordshire	-4.272	-3.557	-2.633	-0.421	-0.476	-0.503
Shropshire	-3.156	-2.590	-1.949	-0.499	-0.557	-0.581
Somerset	-3.535	-2.907	-2.147	-0.486	-0.541	-0.558
Staffordshire	-7.997	-6.571	-4.867	-1.015	-1.105	-1.111
Suffolk	-4.852	-3.925	-2.794	-0.731	-0.812	-0.851
Surrey	-7.143	-5.935	-4.524	-0.882	-1.018	-1.097
Warwickshire	-3.637	-2.977	-2.197	-0.361	-0.401	-0.413
West Sussex	-5.324	-4.480	-3.361	-0.596	-0.642	-0.651
Wiltshire	-4.319	-3.547	-2.613	-0.539	-0.583	-0.590
Isle of Wight CC	-1.014	-0.843	—	-0.177	-0.200	—
Isle of Wight Council	—	—	-0.969	—	—	-0.882

The 1995–96 figures do not include interest receipts in respect of shire police authorities. However, the figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95 for all shire countries, except Northumberland, contain an element in respect of police services since the SSA elements for police-related expenditure formed part of the county council SSA in those years.

The figures for the Isle of Wight Council cover the whole Isle of Wight area.

The interest receipts element in the capital financing block assumes that all reserved receipts are set aside to repay debt, ie no part of such receipts is used to repay debt early.

Climate Change Programme

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the Department of Trade and Industry's new energy projections for the United Kingdom climate change programme.

Mr. Gummer: The new projections, announced today by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, show that we can be confident of meeting our commitment under the climate change convention and that we now expect to exceed it, with emissions of carbon dioxide by the year 2001 significantly below 1990 levels.

This achievement reflects the impact of the United Kingdom climate change programme which was published in January last year.

In some areas we have exceeded our earlier expectations. In particular there has been a significant reduction in the carbon intensity of fuels used for electricity generation, through increased investment in combined cycle gas turbines and through improved performance of nuclear generation. This reflects the success of our policies of privatisation and continuing deregulation of the electricity and gas industries.

Some parts of the programme are not now expected to deliver as much as originally envisaged. In part this reflects the lower carbon intensity of the electricity displaced by some energy saving measures as a result of the success of the supply side changes. On VAT on domestic fuel and power, the 8 per cent. rate is now expected to contribute about 0.4 million tonnes of carbon—MtC—compared with the original estimate of 1.5MtC at the full rate of VAT. In addition, the Energy Saving Trust is currently reviewing its plans. It estimates that the programme of activities already established and financed and will save about 0.3MtC. This compares with an assumption in the new projections that the EST would deliver 1.6MtC by 2000, based on full delivery of the original target of 2.5MtC, adjusted for changes in carbon intensity of electricity displaced. The trust's further schemes will make additional contributions to the programme but are not yet established.

Overall, it would be reasonable to adjust the projections by about 1 MtC to reflect these changes in the trust's plans, suggesting that carbon dioxide emissions will be 6–13 MtC below 1990 levels by 2000. This represents

savings of 16–24 MtC against the projections of which the climate change programme was based.

While there have been some changes in the relative contributions expected from the various elements of the programme, the Government continue to be fully committed to the package of measures set out in the UK climate change programme, and will continue to seek further cost effective ways of reducing carbon emissions. My Department will publish an update to the CO2 chapter of the climate change programme as soon as possible, reporting progress on each of the measures.

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new commitments on greenhouse gas emissions for the period beyond 2000 he will be proposing at the first conference of parties to the climate change convention.

Mr. Gummer: In our national programme under the climate change convention we made clear the need to begin now to look beyond 2000 at further steps which may need to be taken to combat the risk of climate change. We held a national conference last year to discuss the way ahead. This will be an important issue at the first conference of the parties to the convention, which takes place in Berlin at the end of this month.

The countries of the European Union have led the way in calling for a decision at Berlin to begin negotiations on new commitments beyond 2000. We have said that Berlin should set in hand the negotiation of a protocol which should strengthen and extend the existing commitments.

The EU has called on all developed country parties to take measures aimed at stabilising CO2 emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000 and to work towards further steps to limit and reduce emissions of all greenhouse gases.

At Berlin I shall therefore be calling on all OECD countries to accept this challenge recognising that, in order to encourage others to demonstrate their commitment to the convention, these countries must continue to take the lead. We cannot wait until the end of the century before deciding what to do next. Negotiations must start in Berlin towards agreeing new commitments which, using a comprehensive or "basket" approach, would aim at beginning to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries below 1990 levels.

The Government believe that developed countries should agree a new objective for the year 2010 to guide their commitment to adopt appropriate policies and measures. Agreement on a figure for total greenhouse gas emissions reductions in the range of 5 to 10 per cent. below 1990 levels would seem to be a credible and achievable next step for these countries to take, within the framework of the convention.

This would represent a challenge set against the projections of likely growth in our economies over the next 15 years. But the UK would undertake to set in hand work on implementing policies and measures needed to achieve such an objective, assuming others could agree to do the same. The prompt and successful implementation of our existing commitments, and the continuing effects of the measures we have already taken, will put us in an excellent position to do so.

Water and Sewerage Companies

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the director of the Office of Water Services about the pay and perks of directors and executives of the North West, Severn Trent and Yorkshire water and sewerage companies.

Mr. Atkins: None.

Housing

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sums *(a)* pledged to and *(b)* provided for housing associations to build new homes for rent in each local authority area in Yorkshire and Humberside in the latest available year, together with the number of such homes which will be built in 1995–96 and the number of applications on current housing lists in each area.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Allocations made to housing associations from the Housing Corporation's approved development programme at the start of 1994–95, and those for 1995–96, to build new homes for rent in Yorkshire and Humberside are as listed by local authority area.

Local Authority	*Allocation 1994–95 (£'000s)*	*Related Units (1994–95)*	*Allocation 1995–96 (£'000s)*	*Related Units (1995–96)*
Barnsley	1,445	59	875	33
Beverley	812	20	409	11
Boothferry	708	25	295	12
Bradford	8,373	280	5,438	212
Calderdale	3,067	92	1,206	47
Cleethorpes	867	31	367	17
Craven	711	28	187	7
Doncaster	2,878	122	1,585	70
East Yorkshire	1,149	42	425	25
Glanford	609	31	305	16
Great Grimsby	2,047	88	1,108	51
Hambleton	520	27	382	16
Harrogate	1,851	79	815	31
Holderness	368	28	252	15
Kingston upon Hull	3,959	145	1,843	87
Kirklees	6,950	231	3,126	116
Leeds	9,877	461	4,708	231
Richmondshire	530	26	249	11
Rotherham	1,076	45	578	30
Ryedale	821	38	444	22
Scarborough	1,851	86	553	23
Scunthorpe	—	—	155	10

Local Authority	Allocation 1994–95 (£'000s)	Related Units (1994–95)	Allocation 1995–96 (£'000s)	Related Units (1995–96)
Selby	743	41	370	40
Sheffield	7,444	291	2,786	121
Wakefield	2,861	117	1,126	52
York	1,497	72	672	42

The number of households on local authority housing waiting lists in Yorkshire and Humberside on 1 April 1994 is given in section B of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library. Data on housing associations waiting lists are not collected centrally.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the names of the authorities to be included in the programme for housing transfers by councils in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I am today announcing the names of the 11 authorities who will be able to proceed, on a voluntary basis and subject to the approval of their tenants, with proposals to transfers their housing stock to housing associations in 1995–96.

I am pleased that it has been possible to include 11 authorities on the 1995—96 programme of large scale voluntary transfers which comprises nearly 47,000 dwellings valued at over £500 million.

This is part of the Government's commitment to a continuing programme of transfers as means of generating private finance to repair and improve the condition of social housing and to increase the diversity and choice for tenants.

The 11 authorities which have successfully gained a place on the 1995–96 programme, together with 12 recipient housing associations, are as follows:

East Hampshire District Council (4,300 dwellings) to East Hampshire Housing Association;

Eastleigh District Council (4,682 dwellings) to Eastleigh Housing Association;

Hastings Borough Council (4,662 dwellings) to the Hastings and St Leonards Housing Associations;

Kennet District Council (4,996 dwellings) to Sarsen Housing Association;

Manchester City Council (1,460 dwellings) to Manchester and District Housing Association;

North Wiltshire District Council (6,300 dwellings) to the North Wiltshire Housing Association;

Purbeck District Council (1,860 dwellings) to Purbeck Housing Association;

Rushmoor District Council (5,000 dwellings) to Rushmoor Housing Association;

Spelthorne District Council (4,291 dwellings) to Spelthorne Housing Association;

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (3,236 dwellings) to Windsor and District Housing Association.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (2,981 dwellings) to Maidenhead and District Housing Association;

Wyre Borough Council (3,036 dwellings) to Wyre Housing Association.

To date, 37 authorities have disposed of all or part of their stock to new landlords and three more are due to do so by the end of this financial year. I know that, in addition to the 11 authorities listed, other authorities are working up proposals to transfer. There will be opportunities to add these authorities to the 1995–96 programme if they make good progress with their proposals in the coming months.

The Government's policy is that transfers should be housing associations which are registered with the Housing Corporation and which are independent of the council. Authorities owning more than 5,000 dwellings will normally be required to split these between two or more new landlords. Transfers are to be wholly funded by private sector sources and the Secretary of State will consent to transfers only where the majority of tenants are not opposed to the idea.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Sir Paul Beresford: Sir Terry Heiser and Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield have retired as permanent secretaries in this Department in the five years from 1 March 1990. Ministers have appointed them to the following positions:

Sir Terry Heiser to the trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield to continue as chairman of the sponsoring committee for the construction of the international cross channel gas interconnector. Sir Geoffrey has also carried out two internal management reviews; of the senior staffing of the Health and Safety Executive and of finance, planning and policy arrangements of the Royal Fine Arts Commission.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom Government intend to make to the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Mr. David Davis: The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. It has established an international norm against the spread of nuclear weapons and provides for effective International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards to verify compliance. We are working hard to secure the treaty's indefinite and unconditional extension at he review and extension conference in April and May.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the achievement of an international agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons is an objective of the United Kingdom Government.

Mr. David Davis: We are committed to article VI of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, whereby we undertake to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

For our part, we have made a number of important changes to our nuclear forces: we have announced the elimination of our land and surface maritime tactical nuclear capability; we have substantially reduced the number of nuclear bombs carried by our aircraft; and we have decided that Trident will carry fewer warheads than originally envisaged. The overall effect of these changes will be that, when Trident is fully in service, the explosive power of the United Kingdom's entire operational nuclear inventory will have been reduced by more than 25 per cent. since 1990.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia about the arrest and subsequent treatment of East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao; and when he next intends to raise this case with the Government of Indonesia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: With our EU partners, we made representations to the Government of Indonesia during the course of Xanana Gusmao's trial in 1993. We have urged the Indonesian Government to allow representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross regular access to him, and will continue to monitor developments in his case.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia about the arrest and subsequent treatment of Mr. Muchtar Pakpahan and Amosi Telaumbanua, of the Indonesian Welfare Labour Union; and when he next intends to raise these cases with the Government of Indonesia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Union expressed concern in a public statement on 22 November 1994 about Mr. Pakpahan's conviction and sentencing on 13 February 1995 about the increased sentences given to him and Mr. Telaumbanua on appeal. With other EU embassies in Jakarta, we will continue to monitor their situation.

Harjit Singh

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the report of the hearing on 28 January into the case of Harjit Singh has now been prepared by his officers in the high commission in New Delhi.

Mr. Baldry: At the 28 January hearing in the Harjit Singh case, a deputy superintendent of the Punjab police gave evidence. A senior police superintendent has since given evidence at hearings on 10 February and 3 March. The next hearing is due to take place on 11 March, when the police lawyer will give evidence. The case continues.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press for restrictions on the international transportation of nuclear waste in discussions on the future of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. David Davis: No. The international transport of nuclear waste resulting from civil nuclear activities is a matter for the commercial utilities. Provided that strict adherence is paid to international regulations governing safety of material and transportation, we would not interfere.

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *172*, what were the exact dates that staff attached to the Jakarta embassy visited East Timor in November 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The dates were 14 to 19 November.

Vietnamese Refugees

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many refugees from Vietnam are still in Hong Kong.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are currently 1,696 refugees from Vietnam in Hong Kong, as well as 21,802 Vietnamese migrants who have been screened out as non-refugees, and 120 Vietnamese migrants awaiting screening.

Fee-paying Schools

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in his Department have *(a)* children in fee-paying schools for whom Her Majesty's Government meet the bill because the officials are posted abroad and *(b)* children in fee-paying schools for whom Her Majesty's Government meet the bill after the officials have returned because their children remain in the school; and if he will detail the cost for the last three years for each of these two categories.

Mr. Baldry: In 1994–95 *(a)* 278 officers serving overseas and *(b)* 184 officers serving in the United Kingdom, have children at fee-paying schools in the United Kingdom. Costs in these categories are as follows:

£million

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
a)	3.97	3.95	4.13
b)	3.76	3.93	4.04

The FCO does not meet the whole bill for each child. It makes a contribution towards basic fees but up to a ceiling based on the average fees of schools in the headmasters' conference.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which permanent secretaries

have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Baldry: Lord Wright, Sir David Gillmore and Tim Lankester—ODA—have left this Department in the last five years from 1 March 1990. Ministers have not offered them any public appointments.

Mr. Nick Leeson

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the German authorities in respect of denying access by the media to Mr. Nick Leeson.

Mr. Baldry: None. The German authorities have not denied access to Mr. Leeson by the media. Access is a matter for Mr. Leeson, his lawyer and the German police authorities.

Western Sahara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent actions have been taken to promote the referendum on the future of the Western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The United Nations' identification commission is continuing the work of drawing up the voting list for the referendum in Western Sahara. UN Security Council resolution 973, adopted on 13 January this year, provided for an increase in the size of the identification commission. The UN sent a multi-disciplinary technical team to the area in February to plan the return of refugees, as provided for under the UN's settlement plan.

Mexico

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings are held between representatives of Her Majesty's Government and different political parties in Mexico; and what monitoring is undertaken of human rights in the Chiapas region.

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Our embassy in Mexico City maintains close contact with the ruling political party and the main opposition parties of Mexico. They monitor human rights observance in the whole country, with particular attention to Chiapas at present.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are currently on invalidity benefit in Northern Ireland; what percentage of the population this represents; what the figures were in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The information requested is as follows:

Invalidity Benefit Statistics

Year	*Recipients*	*Percentage of Population*
1979	29,330	1.9
1983	33,935	2.2
1987	40,840	2.6
1994	71,275	4.4

Mobility Allowance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce mobility allowance for those under the age of five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: On 1 April 1992 mobility allowance was replaced by the mobility component of disability living allowance. There are no plans to extend the payment to children under five at present.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Sir John Wheeler: Sir John Blelloch and Sir Kenneth Bloomfield have retired as permanent secretaries in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments in the five years from 1 March 1990. Ministers have subsequently appointed them to the following positions:

Sir John Blelloch

Chairman of the Committee for Monitoring Tobacco Advertising and Sponsoring

Chairman of the GB Committee of the NI Partnership.

Member of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on Business Appointments.

Member of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Public Records.

Trustee of the RAF Museum.

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield

Member of Queen's University Senate.

Member of the Law Reform Advisory Committee for NI.

Non-Executive Director of Green Park Health and Social Services Trust.

Chairman of NI Higher Education Council.

Social Fund

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further adjustments he will make to the discretionary social fund budget in the current financial year.

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland social fund discretionary budget for 1994–95 will be increased as a result of continuing better than expected loan recoveries by the Social Security Agency and adjustments will be made to take account of pressures and easements in the budgets of a number of the agency's 11 districts.

The overall budget for loans will be increased by £230,000 while the budget for grants will be increased by £20,000, increasing the original allocations to £20,693,600 and £9,756,400 respectively. There will also be a small internal adjustment to the grants budgets for several districts to reflect variations in demand for assistance from the fund at local level.

Details of the revised budgets have been placed in the Library.

Social fund budget 1994–95: proposed revised allocations

	Loans			Grants			
District	*Current allocation*	*Additional February 1995*	*Revised total*	*Current allocation*	*Reduction*	*Additional February 1995*	*Revised total*
Belfast North	1,943,032	25,000	1,968,032	959,544	—	—	959,544
Belfast south And Down	1,813,183	—	1,813,183	813,294	—	—	813,294
Belfast west	2,349,324	90,000	2,439,324	957,128	—	—	957,128
Central	1,874,063	55,000	1,929,063	920,545	—	20,000	940,545
East	1,551,236	—	1,551,236	790,586	—	—	790,586
Laganbann	1,656,630	—	1,656,630	974,053	—	—	974,053
Mourne	1,666,609	—	1,666,609	827,611	—	—	827,611
North east	1,681,632	—	1,681,632	795,930	30,000	—	765,930
North west	2,379,068	30,000	2,409,068	925,935	—	—	925,935
South east Antrim	1,735,170	30,000	1,765,170	805,300	—	—	805,300
West	1,813,653	—	1,813,653	966,474	—	30,000	996,474
Total	20,463,600	230,000	20,693,600	9,736,400	30,000	50,000	9,756,400

TRANSPORT

Departmental Property

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many domestic properties are currently owned *(a)* by his Department, *(b)* by his Department's agencies and *(c)* by contractors working under his Department's directions; and what is the estimated value of this stock.

Mr. Watts: All domestic properties acquired in connection with my Department's activities are owned in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Day-to-day responsibility for properties purchased in connection with the trunk roads programme rests with the chief executive of the Highways Agency. At 1 March 1995 there were 4,038 such properties. The stock of properties held by the HA is being revalued on 1 April 1995 and I will write to my hon. Friend with this information as soon as it is available.

A further eight domestic properties are held, in the name of the Secretary of State, by the Coastguard Agency. These properties are currently being valued as part of an overall asset valuation being undertaken by the agency and expected to be concluded in April.

No properties are purchased by contractors on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Driving Licences

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when and what measures he intends to introduce to give effect to the Council directive—91/439/EEC—on driving licences adopted in July 1991 to give effect to a separate theory testing as part of the driving test.

Mr. Norris: We shall be making an announcement shortly.

Light Goods Vehicles

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the LGV accident record on the Isle of Man following the introduction of the new law for instructors three years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: None.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has carried out in the last five years into the relationship between the HGV accident rate and the number of hours driven immediately before an accident.

Mr. Norris: My Department has commissioned research from the Transport Research Laboratory on sleep and driving. A composite report covering the accident involvement of heavy goods vehicle drivers in relation to sleep, together with sleepiness among male car drivers, is expected to be published by late May.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce the limit on the maximum length of working day permitted for HGV drivers.

Mr. Norris: European Community regulations set limits on HGV driving time and minimum requirements for daily and weekly rest periods which effectively limit the length of the driver's working day. Currently, we do not anticipate further changes.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Norris: Sir Alan Bailey retired as permanent secretary in this Department on 25 June 1991. He was appointed as a part-time member of the London Transport Board in December 1991.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his consultation document on the future of the proposed east London river crossing.

Mr. Norris: Soon after Easter.

Road Construction

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all major road construction projects carried out by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* his Department in each year since 1979, giving their costs at 1995 prices.

Mr. Watts: My Department does not hold information requested on major road construction undertaken by local authorities.

Details of all national road programme schemes completed since 1979 by the Department and the Highways Agency, are contained in roads White Papers and departmental reports which are held in the Library. Costs are quoted as estimated outturn prices and could be updated to 1995 prices only at disproportionate cost.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Norris: The Department does not keep a central record of applications for career breaks, but the Department's personnel information system records that in the last five years, 67 men and 716 women were given discretionary special leave with or without pay. This does not include those taking statutory maternity leave or staff on long-term sick leave, but does include those suspended. Of these, six have had their appointment terminated while on special leave.

Trans-European Road Network

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with which bodies he consulted in drawing up the UK master plan on *(a)* the trans-European road network and *(b)* the trans-European rail and combined transport network.

Mr. Watts: Consultations took place with:

a) Local authority associations in England and the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales about the trans-European road network.

b) British Rail, European Passenger Services, Railtrack and Northern Ireland Railways on railways.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what environmental and economic criteria he used to select schemes for inclusion in the trans-European road network.

Mr. Watts: The United Kingdom routes that the Government proposed for inclusion in the trans-European road network were put forward on the basis of their contribution to meeting the aims set out for trans-European networks in the treaty on European Union.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average net present value for schemes designated part of the United Kingdom trans-European road network.

Mr. Watts: It is not possible to provide an average net present value.

Net present values are calculated separately for each scheme and are normally published when individual schemes reach the public consultation stage. Not all schemes on TERN routes have reached this stage.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has conducted into the indirect economic benefits to the United Kingdom of the UK section of the trans-European road network.

Mr. Watts: The trans-European transport network plans are still in draft form pending adoption by the Council and the European Parliament.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimates his Department has made of the cost of implementing the UK sections of *(a)* the trans-European road network, *(b)* the trans-European high-speed rail network, *(c)* the trans-European conventional rail network and *(d)* the trans-European combined transport network.

Mr. Watts: None. The network plans are still in draft form pending adoption by the Council and the European Parliament. The networks will, in any case, be indicative and place no obligation on member states to commit expenditure.

Railtrack Access Changes

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what change he has made in the authorised charges to be made by Railtrack to train operating companies; what sums were previously expected to be received in total income and what sums are not expected; and what will be the effect of the difference in rail improvements and maintenance.

Mr. Watts: The Rail Regulator is responsible for approving the access charges levied by Railtrack. The regulator recently announced, following a review of Railtrack's access charges, that charges in 1995–96 should be, on average, 8 per cent. lower in real terms than their level in 1994–95. Thereafter, they will be reduced in real terms by 2 per cent. per annum. The regulator has stated that he considers that this level of income will generate sufficient cash flow to enable Railtrack to finance the investment programme needed to maintain a safe, effective and efficient network.

Total access charges levied by Railtrack on franchised passenger train operators in 1994–95 were £2,065 million.

Drive Programme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to work with the EU in relation to its new Drive programme to develop an integrated road transport environment in the UK and Europe.

Mr. Watts: The Department of Transport has worked closely with the European Commission to design, build and manage both the previous phases of the Drive programme. We have helped the Commission to put

together the work plan for the next programme; where appropriate, we are supporting and joining consortia bidding to undertake the work; we are offering to help the Commission in its evaluation process; and we intend to participate fully in the arrangements that the Commission is making to monitor and manage the new programme itself.

Chideock-Morcombe Lake Bypass

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects to announce his decision on the A35 Chideock-Morcombe lake bypass; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to receive the inspector's report into the public inquiry on the A35 Chideock-Morcombe lake bypass.

Mr. Watts: The timing of an announcement will be subject to the receipt of the inspector's report, and the need for the Secretaries of State to give careful consideration to the inspector's conclusions and recommendations.

I understand that the inspector expects to be able to submit his report to the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport by the middle of the year.

Road Pricing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent research his Department has undertaken into the concept of road pricing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: A major research project into the implications of introducing congestion charging in London is nearing completion. The findings will be made public later this year. My Department has also provided some financial support for research by local authorities outside London.

Particulate Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Department of Health concerning the number of early deaths from particulate pollution.

Mr. Norris: Particulate emissions are currently being considered by a sub-group of the Department of Health's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants which was set up to advise Government on the effects on health of air pollutants both in outdoor and indoor air. My officials are fully involved with COMEAP.

PRIME MINISTER

National Service

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the number of people who have performed national service *(a)* in each of the armed services, *(b)* in the Merchant Navy and *(c)* comparable service for the National Coal Board.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is not available.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards encouraging party political debate on the Internet.

The Prime Minister: Her Majesty's Government are all in favour of a full and frank political debate on the Internet or in any other forum.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister if he will dismiss the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford); and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement regarding manufacturing employment.

The Prime Minister: In the quarter to December 1994, employment in manufacturing industry rose by 37,000 the largest rise since quarterly records began.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legislative measures he will introduce to increase the number of unemployed young people who enter training programmes.

Mr. Paice: There are no legislative measures planned for this purpose. The Government are committed to increasing the range of options in education and training available to young people and increasing the level of advice and guidance provided by the Careers Service.

EU Directives

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will instigate a publicity campaign giving advanced warning to employers of the retrospective application of the workplace, signs and construction products directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: Whenever European Community directives are implemented, appropriate publicity is given to the relevant implementing regulations. The workplace directive, safety signs directive and construction products directive are at different stages of implementation. In no case do the regulations apply retrospectively.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the impact on small businesses of the workplace, signs and construction products directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: A cost benefit analysis or compliance cost assessment is prepared in respect of all new regulations implementing European Community directives. The workplace directive, safety signs directive and construction products directive are at different stages of implementation. In each case assessments have been made of the likely costs of the relevant regulations.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Miss Widdecombe: Sir Geoffrey Holland transferred from the Employment Department to the Department for Education on 13 January 1993.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in the Overseas Development Administration from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* One invitation to meet business men was received and accepted.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney General which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

The Attorney-General: Sir James Nursaw KCB, QC retired as Treasury Solicitor in October 1992. He was part-time legal adviser to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission during 1992–93 and is currently part-time counsel to the Chairman of Committees (House of Lords).

Sir Allan Green QC resigned as Director of Public Prosecutions in October 1991. He has not been appointed to any public positions.

EDUCATION

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which permanent secretaries have left her Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Boswell: In the five years from 1 March 1990, Sir John Caines KCB and Sir Geoffrey Holland KCB have left the Department for Education. Sir John Caines has since been appointed as an advisor to the National Heritage memorial fund and a council member of the Open university. Sir Geoffrey Holland has not been appointed by Ministers to any public positions.

School Funding

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 3 March, *Official Report,* column *775,* concerning priorities in educational expenditure, if she will publish the text of the letters she has sent to her hon. Friends on this topic.

Mr. Forth: No.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the average sizes of single teacher classes in each year since 1979–80 in maintained *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* overall.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average sizes of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools in England between 1980 and 1994, the latest date for which information is available, are shown in the table.

Average sizes of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools in England 1980–1994

Position in January each year

	Primary Schools	*[1]Secondary Schools*	*[1]Primary and Secondary Schools*
1980	25.4	21.0	23.2
1981	25.2	21.0	23.0
1982	25.1	20.9	22.9
1983	24.8	20.8	22.7
1984	24.7	20.6	22.5
1985	24.9	20.6	22.7
1986	25.5	20.6	22.9
1987	25.4	20.4	22.9
1988	25.4	20.1	22.8
1989	25.7	20.1	23.0
1990	25.9	20.3	23.2
1991	26.3	20.6	23.7
1992	26.4	20.9	23.8
1993	26.6	21.2	24.1
1994	26.9	21.4	24.3

[1] excluding Sixth Form Colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from 1 April 1993.

Overseas Students

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will announce the Government's decision on the proposal to amend the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1994 to allow institutions to charge overseas students on part-time courses higher fees; and further, whether she will publish the responses to the consultation exercise engaged in by her Department.

Mr. Boswell: The Government have carefully considered the responses to the consultation exercise announced last September. In the light of the general support for the proposal shown by the responses to the exercise from institutions, the Government have decided to lay before Parliament an amendment to the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1994 to allow higher and further education institutions to charge all students on part-time courses a higher fee, representing the full cost of their course, where they do not meet the three-year residency requirement and are not excepted.

The amendment will not alter, in any way, institutions' present discretion to set their own fee levels or to waive or reduce fees for asylum seekers if they choose.

In line with the code of practice on access to Government information, a summary of the responses to the consultation exercise will be provided by the

Department from today. A copy will be placed in the Library. Copies of individual responses will be made available in the public enquiry room of the Department, unless the respondent has specifically requested confidentiality.

Community Facilities

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what advice her Department gives to local education authorities regarding the provision of community or adult education facilities financed by local education authorities; and what advice her Department gives to the Department of the Environment regarding the provision of finance for such facilities and courses.

Mr. Boswell: It is for individual local education authorities to secure the adequate provision for their areas of certain types of further education for adults, as defined by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The Department does not issue any advice to local education authorities on this matter.

The Department keeps the Department of the Environment abreast of spending needs in this area, and discusses with them and the local authority associations the provision of funding to local education authorities.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students are in receipt of discretionary grants for the latest year for which figures are available; and what are the main subjects or courses being studied.

Mr. Boswell: Local authority returns show that my Department in 1992–93, the latest year for which data are available, there were 220,000 discretionary awards. A total of 24,000 awards were for courses of higher education of which 3,000 were for postgraduate courses; and 196,000 awards were for further education courses. Information on the subjects studied by award holders is not collected centrally.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what advice her Department gives to local education authorities regarding the financing of student courses on a discretionary basis; and what advice her Department gives to the Department of the Environment regarding the provision of finance for discretionary grants.

Mr. Boswell: It is for individual local education authorities to determine their own discretionary awards policies in the light of local needs and priorities. The Department does not produce any central guidance on this issue.

The Department keeps the Department of the Environment abreast of spending needs in this area, and discusses with them and the local authority associations the provision of funding to local education authorities.

Further Education (Funding)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the demarcation between *(a)* community and adult education courses funded by local education authorities, *(b)* courses of further and higher education funded by Higher Education Funding Council and *(c)* courses for which training and enterprise councils are responsible.

Mr. Boswell: Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the further education funding councils and local education authorities are jointly responsible for securing the adequate provision for their areas of all kinds of further education for adults. The FEFCs are responsible for securing the provision of the type of further education defined in schedule 2 to the Act—mainly vocational, academic, access and basic skills courses. LEAs have responsibility for securing the provision of all other kinds of further education—mainly leisure and recreational courses.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England funds HE institutions for non-vocational community education through its funding methodology for part-time teaching, and for continuing vocational education where the institutions apply successfully for development funding.

Training and enterprise councils are responsible generally for co-ordinating the training needs of their areas and specifically for delivering the youth training programme for young people and the training for work programme for adults.

Special Needs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the allocation for each local education authority for special educational needs support in 1994–95 and 1995–96, broken down into the categories *(a)* training, *(b)* school policies and *(c)* parent partnership schemes in each year.

Mr. Forth: The allocations to each local education authority for these grants, made under the grants for edcuation support and training programme, are shown in the table.

GUEST Allocation for Special Educational Needs 1994–95 and 1995–96

£ thousand

LEA	*(a) Training for SEN specialisms 1994–95*	*(a) Training for SEN specialisms 1995–96*	*(b) School SEN policies 1994–95*	*(b) School SEN policies 1995–96*	*(c) SEN Parent partnership schemes 1994–95*	*(c) SEN Parent partnership schemes 1995–96*
Corporation of London	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.3
Camden	44.0	39.8	13.2	24.8	23.0	23.0
Greenwich	76.4	75.6	23.0	44.7	18.0	20.0
Hackney	37.0	37.5	19.7	35.3	31.0	35.5
Hammersmith	69.0	63.0	11.9	22.4	10.0	10.0
Islington	80.0	137.4	16.7	32.8	10.0	13.0
Kensington and Chelsea	24.0	21.6	7.6	13.4	10.0	10.0
Lambeth	28.5	51.3	21.2	34.8	24.0	30.5
Lewisham	72.9	65.0	21.2	40.7	49.0	52.5

GUEST Allocation for Special Educational Needs 1994–95 and 1995–96

£ thousand

LEA	Training for SEN specialisms 1994–95	(a) Training for SEN specialisms 1995–96	(b) School SEN policies 1994–95	School SEN policies 1995–96	(c) SEN Parent partnership schemes 1994–95	SEN Parent partnership schemes 1995–96
Southwark	43.9	39.9	21.5	36.3	41.0	42.0
Tower Hamlets	45.5	39.4	22.5	43.7	66.0	67.0
Wandsworth	160.7	172.0	19.2	31.3	51.0	42.0
Westminster	8.4	10.9	12.4	24.3	19.0	19.0
Barking	48.2	32.6	16.1	30.8	29.0	30.0
Barnet	67.4	137.4	27.3	48.2	0.0	38.0
Bexley	45.2	40.4	20.3	35.8	10.0	13.0
Brent	65.6	118.9	20.0	29.3	66.0	70.0
Bromley	39.9	42.9	23.5	38.3	14.0	16.0
Croydon	52.4	47.4	29.3	51.7	21.0	26.5
Ealing	52.6	63.5	25.5	32.8	10.0	49.5
Enfield	43.4	50.7	21.5	38.7	58.0	58.0
Haringey	65.0	59.6	21.7	42.7	14.0	14.0
Harrow	44.7	43.0	16.4	31.3	24.0	25.0
Havering	47.0	45.8	23.5	43.7	14.0	14.0
Hillingdon	40.0	36.9	21.7	29.8	9.0	10.0
Hounslow	44.0	38.7	19.5	36.8	14.0	15.0
Kingston upon Thames	25.8	23.3	11.3	19.9	5.0	10.7
Merton	29.9	28.1	15.5	29.3	19.0	32.5
Newham	63.0	70.0	20.7	39.7	55.0	56.0
Redbridge	46.1	44.8	17.7	34.8	15.0	23.5
Richmond upon Thames	25.2	19.8	11.9	23.3	27.0	30.5
Sutton	21.0	40.2	13.9	21.9	25.0	25.0
Waltham Forest	98.4	63.4	20.3	37.3	15.0	16.0
Birmingham	205.0	216.3	103.9	192.2	72.0	72.0
Coventry	73.0	118.0	32.4	61.6	27.0	40.0
Dudley	76.5	76.3	26.8	48.7	11.0	21.5
Sandwell	65.0	59.7	33.6	64.6	54.0	63.5
Solihull	40.0	34.7	21.2	40.7	14.0	19.5
Walsall	56.0	52.5	31.3	57.1	33.0	33.0
Wolverhampton	39.9	34.5	30.8	58.1	28.0	27.0
Knowsley	40.0	41.0	18.7	36.3	44.0	44.0
Liverpool	125.5	124.6	54.0	103.3	52.0	53.0
St. Helens	45.0	45.5	21.7	38.7	24.0	26.0
Sefton	53.0	49.2	29.3	57.1	25.0	25.0
Wirral	58.8	52.6	32.6	62.6	20.0	20.0
Bolton	62.7	30.3	31.1	58.1	17.0	17.5
Bury	35.0	33.7	21.5	41.2	0.0	19.0
Manchester	120.0	136.8	51.8	99.8	42.0	43.0
Oldham	66.4	64.0	29.9	58.1	29.0	25.0
Rochdale	50.0	43.3	22.5	40.7	14.0	14.0
Salford	55.7	48.3	27.3	51.2	20.1	27.0
Stockport	60.0	57.8	32.4	62.1	24.0	24.0
Tameside	45.0	44.7	16.5	47.7	14.0	14.0
Trafford	44.5	72.3	23.7	44.7	13.0	22.5
Wigan	88.0	81.5	36.7	71.0	38.0	39.0
Barnsley	48.6	48.2	27.3	52.7	20.0	21.0
Doncaster	35.8	56.7	39.2	77.0	29.0	33.0
Rotherham	60.0	144.7	33.6	65.6	28.0	29.0
Sheffield	100.0	89.5	44.3	86.4	29.0	30.0
Bradford	111.0	87.6	63.2	118.7	49.0	49.0
Calderdale	33.7	43.0	12.4	45.2	17.0	18.0
Kirklees	56.0	88.8	49.8	93.4	36.0	40.5
Leeds	130.0	116.4	74.8	144.6	43.0	46.5
Wakefield	60.0	62.0	42.7	79.5	29.0	29.0
Gateshead	40.0	34.7	24.0	46.7	19.0	20.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	114.0	122.2	26.3	50.7	37.0	38.0
North Tyneside	33.0	34.2	21.7	41.7	15.0	18.0
South Tyneside	35.0	27.0	17.6	34.3	30.0	33.0
Sunderland	30.0	53.6	10.0	60.1	20.0	29.0
Isle of Scilly	0.7	2.5	0.1	2.5	0.0	3.5
Avon	140.0	124.0	108.7	212.1	41.0	41.0
Bedfordshire	115.0	131.2	73.1	137.1	26.0	28.0
Berkshire	147.2	169.0	83.6	154.0	36.0	43.0
Buckinghamshire	135.0	202.2	83.4	155.0	49.0	50.0
Cambridgeshire	120.0	117.9	78.3	142.1	58.0	60.0
Cheshire	129.0	151.5	130.6	247.4	58.0	60.0
Cleveland	170.0	134.5	64.7	122.7	29.0	35.0

GUEST Allocation for Special Educational Needs 1994–95 and 1995–96

£ thousand

LEA	Training for SEN specialisms 1994–95	(a) Training for SEN specialisms 1995–96	(b) School SEN policies 1994–95	School SEN policies 1995–96	(c) SEN Parent partnership schemes 1994–95	SEN Parent partnership schemes 1995–96
Cornwall	90.0	119.2	70.7	138.1	29.0	29.0
Cumbria	95.0	80.0	86.4	151.5	29.0	32.5
Derbyshire	139.3	140.0	128.6	239.9	41.0	41.0
Devon	200.0	210.0	126.8	244.9	91.0	92.0
Dorset	91.9	103.0	64.7	120.2	27.0	43.5
Durham	120.0	120.08	55.7	168.4	35.0	29.0
East Sussex	130.0	161.1	64.7	125.2	47.0	49.0
Essex	230.0	230.9	159.0	249.9	92.0	96.0
Gloucestershire	120.8	111.0	74.8	124.7	27.0	28.0
Hampshire	230.0	248.8	171.1	313.5	87.0	87.0
Hereford and Worcester	138.0	178.1	92.4	178.3	0.0	38.0
Hertfordshire	238.0	313.4	128.8	237.0	59.0	60.0
Humberside	165.0	200.0	104.8	203.2	0.0	60.0
Isle of Wight	37.0	73.0	16.9	33.3	9.0	33.5
Kent	340.0	510.0	174.8	303.0	109.0	111.0
Lancashire	280.0	283.5	178.8	343.8	94.0	85.0
Leicestershire	174.0	161.9	76.9	201.7	25.0	29.0
Lincolnshire	75.0	65.0	86.7	144.1	34.0	32.0
Norfolk	110.0	98.6	113.0	205.7	24.0	25.0
North Yorkshire	250.0	128.0	74.4	223.5	91.0	91.0
Northamptonshire	130.0	147.7	83.9	153.5	39.0	39.0
Northumberland	66.3	66.7	33.5	101.3	31.0	32.0
Nottinghamshire	140.0	129.0	128.6	249.4	97.0	97.0
Oxfordshire	105.0	171.0	71.2	140.1	8.0	69.5
Shropshire	112.3	95.2	64.2	119.7	28.0	28.0
Somerset	42.5	2.5	23.6	130.2	49.0	50.0
Staffordshire	220.0	217.8	124.6	240.9	59.0	59.0
Suffolk	125.0	181.3	83.9	165.4	38.0	40.0
Surrey	124.0	219.0	106.8	179.8	0.0	0.0
Warwickshire	105.0	104.3	71.5	132.6	32.0	32.0
West Sussex	140.0	126.3	73.2	142.6	44.0	46.0
Wiltshire	100.0	143.3	82.1	148.5	34.0	34.0
Total	9,668.5	10,500.5	5,444.2	10,500.1	3,518.1	4,000.0

Support and Training

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the full bids for grants for education support and training for the 1995 assessment and testing arrangements for each local education authority.

Mr. Forth: The grants for education support and training allocations for the implementation of national curriculum assessment arrangements, which totalled £23.3 million in 1995–96, were distributed among local education authorities according to a formula, rather than requiring bids from LEAs.

However, 34 of the 109 LEAs did indicate the level of support they were seeking. This information is shown in the table

LEA	*Implementation of National Curriculum Assessment Arrangements (Bids)* £
Corporation of London	15,000
Camden	F
Greenwich	116,600
Hackney	F
Hammersmith	30,000
Islington	F
Kensington and Chelsea	21,200
Lambeth	F
Lewisham	110,800
Southwark	110,000
Tower Hamlets	F
Wandsworth	F
Westminster	F
Barking	F
Barnet	F
Bexley	37,200
Brent	133,240
Bromley	F
Croydon	80,000
Ealing	F
Enfield	F
Haringey	F
Harrow	146,000
Havering	118,600
Hillingdon	90,000
Hounslow	F
Kingston upon Thames	F
Merton	F
Newham	F
Redbridge	65,500
Richmond upon Thames	F
Sutton	F
Waltham Forest	126,500

LEA	Implementation of National Curriculum Assessment Arrangements (Bids) £
Birmingham	F
Coventry	F
Dudley	122,400
Sandwell	F
Solihull	F
Walsall	F
Wolverhampton	90,500
Knowsley	F
Liverpool	F
St. Helens	F
Sefton	129,700
Wirral	115,560
Bolton	F
Bury	F
Manchester	F
Oldham	F
Rochdale	F
Salford	F
Stockport	F
Tameside	F
Trafford	80,000
Wigan	F
Barnsley	F
Doncaster	F
Rotherham	130,700
Sheffield	F
Bradford	F
Calderdale	F
Kirklees	215,310
Leeds	F
Wakefield	F
Gateshead	80,000
Newcastle upon Tyne	F+30,201
North Tyneside	67,720
South Tyneside	F
Sunderland	126,150
Isles of Scilly	32,300
Avon	F
Bedfordshire	F
Berkshire	F
Buckinghamshire	328,000
Cambridgeshire	F
Cheshire	F
Cleveland	F
Cornwall	F
Cumbria	F
Derbyshire	F
Devon	F
Dorset	F
Durham	F
East Sussex	F
Essex	F
Gloucestershire	244,000
Hampshire	F
Hereford and Worcester	240,000
Hertfordshire	F
Humberside	F
Isle of Wight	F
Kent	F
Lancashire	F
Leicestershire	350,000
Lincolnshire	F
Norfolk	F
North Yorkshire	F
Northamptonshire	F
Northumberland	F
Nottinghamshire	F
Oxfordshire	F
Shropshire	F
Somerset	203,000
Staffordshire	482,700
Suffolk	F
Surrey	372,060
Warwickshire	F
West Sussex	277,100
Wiltshire	F
Total	4,918,041

Notes:

1. "F" indicates that the LEA did not submit a bid, but will take up its formula allocation
2. Total is only the total of the bids made (34 of 109 LEAs)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fire Safety

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee on what occasions over the past five years combined familiarisation drills and exercises have been held between the Palace of Westminster fire section, other security staff and the London fire brigade as part of incident pre-planning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ray Powell: Detailed records of familiarisation visits by London fire brigade crews prior to 1993 are not held. Since January 1993 16 familiarisation visits have taken place. Large scale exercises involving the extensive deployment of crews, including a fire boat crew on one occasion, have taken place as follows:

2 October 1990

1 May 1993

1 May 1994

A further large scale exercise with the London brigade is planned for 14 May 1995.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what lessons have been drawn from the fires at Hampton Court palace, Windsor castle and Stormont in relation to minimising fire risk at *(a)* the Palace of Westminster and *(b)* other buildings in the parliamentary estate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ray Powell: Following the publication of the guide to the protection of historic buildings "Heritage Under Fire" in 1990, which drew on the experience of a number of fires including the one at Hampton Court, a fire safety manager was appointed in 1992 to advise on all aspects of fire precautions and means of escape. The publication of a fire safety strategy for the Palace of Westminster and parliamentary outbuildings in 1993 and the establishment of a fire safety committee to review fire risk management and ensure the fire safety strategy is implemented are both in line with the recommendations of the report by Sir Alan Bailey, "Fire Protection Measures for the Royal Palaces", published in May 1993, following the fire at Windsor castle. It is understood that the report into the fire at Parliament buildings, Stormont, will be published in due course.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) if *(a)* the Palace of Westminster and *(b)* other buildings in the parliamentary estate reach the standard of fire safety which would be required for the issue of a fire certificate;

(2) if he will make an assessment of the fire risk of *(a)* the Palace of Westminster and *(b)* other buildings in the parliamentary estate.

Mr. Ray Powell: Home Office fire inspectors have recently assessed the fire risk of the Palace of Westminster and have recommended further measures to be taken. These are being progressed and it is expected that a fire certificate will be issued later this year. The fire risks of the parliamentary outbuildings have also been assessed and fire certificates have already been issued for Norman Shaw North, Norman Shaw South, 1 Canon row and 2 the Abbey garden. A fire certificate for 3 Dean's yard is expected shortly. Some additional works are being carried out in 7 Millbank and the phase 1 building and it is expected that fire certificates will be issued later this year.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what difficulties of access exist for the fire brigade and other emergency services in the event of fire in relation to *(a)* the Press Gallery area and *(b)* other areas presenting access difficulties.

Mr. Ray Powell: Vehicular access for fire brigade appliances into Speaker's Court and the inner courtyards has to be carefully managed because of the size of the archways. This has been tested on exercises held with the London fire brigade. There are no particular difficulties of access for fire brigade and emergency service personnel to the Press Gallery or other areas of the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission (1) what changes in the number of fire officers within the Palace of Westminster's fire section were contained in the recommendation of the Metropolitan police internal reports into fire prevention that were prepared in February 1985 and December 1987.

(2) how many additional fire officer posts within the Palace of Westminster's fire section were recommended by the fire safety manager in 1992; what were the reasons or basis for his recommendations; and how many additional officers were subsequently appointed.

(3) if he will list the establishment of the Palace of Westminster's fire section for the last 10 years, indicating at each appropriate stage the size of the parliamentary estate over which their responsibility extended.

(4) what changes to the establishment, watch rotas, pay and conditions of service of the Palace of Westminster fire section are *(a)* under consideration or *(b)* subject to consultation with trade unions; and if he will make a statement.

(5) if he will make a statement about the role and functions of the members of the Palace of Westminster's fire section in the initial stages of any fire incident being reported.

Mr. Beith: Members of the Palace of Westminster fire section are civilian employees of the Metropolitan police subject to Metropolitan police terms and conditions of service. The role and responsibilities of the fire section are specified in the fire strategy for the Palace of Westminster and parliamentary outbuildings, which was approved by the relevant Committees of both Houses in 1993. A review of the fire section has recently been carried out by the staff inspector in conjunction with the staff inspector of the House of Lords and I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to write to the hon. Member about their recommendations.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will have notices placed around the precincts of the Houses of Parliament ordering drivers of all motor vehicles to turn their motor engines off when their vehicle is stationary or parked; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: No. In my reply to my hon. Friend on 17 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *938*, I stated that this was a matter for the Serjeant at Arms. I understand that instructions have since been given to members of the security force to caution drivers who leave their engines running unnecessarily.

TREASURY

Charges and Salaries

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new measures he proposes to combat the impact of charges he assessed to be unfair, dividends he has assessed to be excessive and top salaries he has assessed to be contrary to *(a)* the consumers' interests and *(b)* the wider national interest.

Sir George Young: These are primarily matters for the companies concerned, within the framework of competition law, the Companies Act and any special regulatory regime prescribed by Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's remarks to the House on 28 February about board remuneration set out the Government's position.

Civil Service

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many new positions are needed to run the new delegated pay systems which the Government has introduced for each department in the civil service.

Sir George Young: Responsibility for the pay and grading of almost two thirds of civil servants is delegated to Departments. "The Civil Service—Taking Forward Continuity and Change" (CM2748) confirmed the Government's intention that all Departments will become responsible for their own pay and grading arrangements below senior levels from 1 April 1996.

It is not possible to give an assessment of the administrative implications of the changes. However, the Government believe that there is considerable potential in the civil service for further improvement both in quality of service, within what can be afforded, and in efficiency. Greater delegation of decisions will enable local needs and circumstances to be taken more fully into account in devising pay and grading systems, will allow Departments to manage and motivate their staff more effectively, and will further strengthen links between reward and performance.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons he has introduced performance-related pay into the public service.

Sir George Young: Performance-related pay helps to support the Government's citizens charter objective to establish a regular and direct link between the contribution made by individuals to the standards of service provided, and their reward. First, it is fair, because it rewards those who have made the greatest contributions. Secondly, more flexible pay systems help to achieve a more effective distribution of resources. Thirdly, performance-related pay focuses effort on the delivery of key objectives by reinforcing an organisation's performance management system.

Tobacco

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what United Kingdom laws govern the distance selling of tobacco products to United Kingdom citizens on mail order from European countries with lower excise duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom law governing the distance selling arrangements for excise goods is the Excise Goods (Holding, Movement, Warehousing and REDS) Regulations 1992. Under these regulations the vendor of the goods in the other member state is liable to pay the UK excise duty.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what effect distance selling of tobacco products has on the legal trade in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Distance selling is a recognised legitimate activity for which provision has been made in EC legislation, which is implemented in United Kingdom legislation in the Excise Goods (Holding, Movement, Warehousing and REDS) Regulations 1992. Such transactions attract payment of UK duty. Accordingly, no separate assessment has been made on the effect that they have on UK trade.

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the number of new residential lettings created under the business expansion scheme in Scotland for each of the years 1988–89 to 1992–93 inclusive and *(b)* the cost per dwelling in Scotland of new residential lettings under business expansion scheme in terms of both income tax relief and exemption from capital gains tax.

Sir George Young: Available estimates for Scotland are in the table. It is not possible to give a reliable estimate of the cost of exempting gains arising from disposals of BES shares from capital gains tax.

Year	*Number of BES new lettings*	*Average cost of income tax relief per new letting (£)*
1988–89	800	17,000
1989–90	400	21,000
1990–91	100	22,000
1991–92	100	10,000
1992–93[1]	600	20,000

[1] Provisional.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the members of the committee which he has appointed to review the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Jack: I shall reply to the hon. Member when I have made the appointments concerned.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of outstanding second-tier reviews of child support cases carried out under section 18 of the Child Support Act 1991; and what steps he has taken to clear the backlog.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 8 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of outstanding requests for reviews to be carried out under Section 18 of the Child Support Act.

At the end of January 1995, 8,099 such requests were outstanding, compared to 10,766 outstanding at the end of July 1994. This reduction reflects the increased emphasis which has been given to this type of work over recent months. I anticipate that the backlog will be cleared by 31 March 1995.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what amount of new maintenance has been collected by the Child Support Agency in each year of its operation to the latest available date.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 8 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the new maintenance collected by the Child Support Agency.

Figures for the whole of 1993/94 and from April 1994 to the end of January 1995 are shown in the table. I have included maintenance paid direct by absent parents (APs) to parents with care (PWCs) in income support (IS) cases. However, I have not included maintenance paid direct between parents who do not use the Agency's collection service in family credit (FC) cases, or cases where benefit is not in payment. This is because your Question seems to be directed specifically at those areas in which the Agency is most closely involved.

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*[1]
Paid direct by Absent Parents to Parents with Care on IS	1	10
Paid through Agency collection service in IS, FC and DWA cases and offsets benefit spending[2]	10	32

£ million

	1993–94	1994–95[1]
Paid through Agency collection service in IS, FC and DWA cases in excess of benefit paid, and to non benefit cases[3]	3	19
Total	[4]15	62

[1] 1994–95 figures cover April 1994 to January 1995.

[2] Maintenance paid through the Agency collection service that offsets benefit spending and therefore leads to benefit savings.

[3] Maintenance paid through the Agency collection service that is passed on to parents with care.

[4] Includes a small element relating to PWCs who used the collection service and were receiving either FC; disability working allowance (DWA), or who were not receiving benefit.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of *(a)* cases take on by the Child Support Agency since April 1993, *(b)* interim maintenance assessments made, *(c)* full maintenance assessments made, *(d)* cases cleared without an assessment being made, *(e)* cases deferred because an effective application has not been made by an income support claimant, *(f)* outstanding case involving a paternity dispute and *(g)* other outstanding cases awaiting assessment.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss. Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 8 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of cases taken on and assessment made by the Child Support Agency.

Between April 1993 and the end of January 1995, the Agency issued 1,190,200 maintenance application forms (on some forms more than one absent parent may be involved); completed 129,000 interim maintenance assessments and 299,100 full maintenance assessments. 403,000 cases were cleared without an assessment being made.

As at the end of January 1995, 432,000 cases were on hand awaiting a maintenance assessment, including 6,800 in which paternity was being disputed. Given the volume of cases dealt with by the Agency we would expect to have around 250,000 cases on hand at any one time.

You also ask about cases deferred because an effective application had not been made by a client receiving income support. I have taken this to refer to those cases deferred as a one off exercise as part of the measures announced on 20 December 1994. This exercise was only completed last week so the full details will not be available until later this month; but by the end of January, there were 2,700 cases where IS applications had been deferred.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many maintenance enquiry forms have been issued to absent parents since the Child Support Agency commenced operation in April 1993;

(2) how many maintenance application forms have been issued since the Child Support Agency commenced operation in April 1993; and what proportion have been issued to parents not already receiving maintenance.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 8 March 1995:

I am replying to recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security abut the number of maintenance enquiry forms (MEFs) and maintenance application forms (MAFs) that have been issued by the Child Support Agency.

From April 1993 to the end of January 1995, 692,900 MEFs were issued to absent parents.

In the same period 1,190,200 MAFs were issued, of which we estimate that 77 per cent. were issued to parents not already receiving maintenance.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many requests for a review of a child support assessment have been made, and what proportion of these has resulted in an application for an appeal to a child support appeal tribunal.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 8 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about reviews and appeals.

From April 1993 to the end of January 1995 the Child Support Agency had received 47,100 requests for review under Section 18 of the Child Support Act.

In the same period 6,800 applications for appeal were made. As not all applications for appeal arise from Section 18 reviews, it is not appropriate to express this figure as a proportion of the total number of Section 18 reviews requested.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of outstanding child maintenance applications are over *(a)* 13 weeks, *(b)* 26 weeks and *(c)* 52 weeks old.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 8 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of state for Social Security about the proportion of outstanding child maintenance applications that are over 13, 26 and 52 weeks old.

The table shows the proportion of cases within these age bands as a percentage of the caseload as at the end of January 1995.

	Percentage of caseload
Cases over 13 weeks old	83
Cases over 26 weeks old	69
Cases over 52 weeks old	48

A significant number of the cases over 26 weeks old will be deferred as part of the measures announced on 20 December 1994.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the total payments being made to the Child Support Agency by absent parents in respect of children whose parents with care were in receipt of relevant state benefits before April 1993 and whose assessment has been completed by the Child Support Agency; and what is the total number of these cases.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Fund

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give *(a)* the figure of the amount lent in Wales under the social fund scheme, *(b)* the amount currently outstanding and *(c)* the numbers of those currently liable.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Mr. Michael Bichard to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 7 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question requesting the figure for the amount lent in Wales under the Social Fund scheme, the amount currently outstanding and the numbers of those currently liable.

You ask for the figure of the amount lent in Wales under the Social Fund scheme. You are probably aware that the Fund has two distinct parts—regulated and discretionary. Social Fund Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans are part of the discretionary part of the scheme.

The amount of loans expenditure in Wales for the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995 is £12,143,769.41. The amount currently outstanding (unspent) in Wales for loans in the current financial year is £2,823,256.00. I am also able to tell you that as at 31 January 1995 £13,597.79, in total, was owed by applicants in the Benefits Agency Districts in Wales. This figure will include amounts outstanding on loans currently being repaid and for loans where recovery has been interrupted or deferred.

I am unable to supply the numbers of those currently liable as the Social Fund Computer System does not count the number of individual customers. However, the number of awards made in Wales for loans for the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995 is 77,417. As a customer may have more than one loan outstanding, and many customers will have repaid their loan(s) within this period, this figure may be greater than the number of those currently liable.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the number of cases in which funds have been recovered by the Compensation Recovery Unit during the last year for which figures are available; what were the administrative and other costs of the unit during that period; and what was the gross and net sum ingathered after allowing for those costs;

(2) how many staff are presently employed in the Compensation Recovery Unit.

Mr. Roger Evans: These are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Mr. Michael Bichard to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 7 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the number of staff currently employed in the Compensation Recovery Unit; the administrative and other costs of the unit; the number of cases handled by it and the gross and net sums ingathered after allowing for these costs during the last year for which figures are available.

The total number of people employed in the Compensation Recovery Unit at the present time is 196; this includes 46 part time staff.

During the period from 1 April 1994 to 28 February 1995, the number of cases in which sums have been recovered amounts to 60,821 and the sum recouped was £91,750,000. After taking into account costs of £4,070,000, the net amount recovered equates to £87,680,000.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those who have been granted exceptional leave to remain are in receipt of income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: People who have been granted exceptional leave to remain are not separately identified within the income support scheme.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many PDD12 claimants have appealed against category O X-ray evidence since September 1993.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is available only to 2 October 1994 when the total number of appeals received against the category O X-ray was 3,416.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many posthumous PDD12 claims there have been to date; and how many have received an award;

(2) how many PDD12 claimants rejected for an award when they were living because the X-ray evidence was category O have been made a posthumous award after death based on the findings of the pathologist's report;

(3) how many PDD12 appellants have been referred for fresh X-rays because the ones on which the original diagnosis was made were unsuitable.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefit Payment Card

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *320*, if he will name the five potential suppliers of a benefit payment card.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on 9 December, *Official Report*, column *385*.

Pneumoconiosis

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants to whom an award was made for pneumoconiosis in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1993 had it increased because the disease worsened an attendant condition.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many awards for pneumoconiosis were made in each of the coalfield areas in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1993.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available by coalfield areas. New awards for pneumoconiosis in the coal mining industry, analysed by disability benefit centre, are in the table.

New awards for pneumoconiosis in the coal mining industry by disability benefit centre

Disability benefit centre	*1980*	*1986*	*1993*
Cardiff	113	71	58
Swansea	22	38	22
Glasgow	6	7	10
Stoke	23	38	27
Sheffield	179	142	205
Manchester	30	18	12
Newcastle	84	37	58
London	4	6	3
All panels	461	357	395

Note:
Based on a 100 per cent. count.

Housing Benefit

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the total cost of housing benefit in Scotland for (i) tenants of new towns, Scottish Homes and local authorities, (ii) tenants of housing associations and (iii) tenants of private landlords and *(b)* the total number of households in Scotland receiving housing benefit in respect of (1) Scottish Homes, local authorities and new towns, (2) housing associations and co-operatives and (3) the private rented sector for each year since 1982–83.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit in Scotland average caseload and expenditure

Year	*Caseload (thousands)*			*Expenditure (millions)*	
	Rent rebate	*Rent allowance*		*Rent rebate (£)*	*Rent allowance (£)*
		All private tenants (including HA tenants)	*Housing association tenants*		
1983–84	n/a	n/a	n/a	182.08	29.81
1984–85	n/a	n/a	n/a	200.63	41.18
1985–86	n/a	n/a	n/a	224.87	55.47
1986–87	n/a	n/a	n/a	258.33	71.39
1987–88	n/a	n/a	n/a	291.42	88.67
1988–89	494	72	n/a	314.15	86.29
1989–90	478	79	n/a	363.75	113.23
1990–91	467	76	n/a	400.30	119.36
1991–92	466	76	n/a	444.26	136.37
1992–93	460	83	22	489.82	169.17
1993–94	457	93	30	[1]523.99	[1]202.31
1994–95	446	103	34	[1]537.30	[1]230.98

Sources:
Caseload, housing benefit information system.
Expenditure, DSS planning and finance division.
Notes:
1. Rent rebate, includes local authority, new town and Scottish Homes' tenants.
2. Rent allowance, includes housing association and other private sector tenants.
3. n/a = Not available.
[1] Provisional.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *c. 623-24*, how many of the asylum seekers in receipt of income support are *(a)* awaiting an initial decision on their application and *(b)* appealing against it.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Habitual Residence

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons from the Republic of Ireland not habitually resident in the United Kingdom at the time of their claim have been in receipt of *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit schemes since 1 August 1994, giving the sums paid under each heading.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Residential Care and Nursing Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of residents of care or nursing homes whose total entitlement to care funding does not meet their fees for each year since 1979.

Mr. Roger Evans: Reliable information is not available before November 1992.

The number of residents with preserved rights to the higher limits of income support whose total entitlement to social security benefits does not meet the fees is:

	Number
November 1992	91,500
November 1993	85,000
February 1994	78,500

Source:
Income support statistics quarterly inquiries November 1992, November 1993 and February 1994.

Some of these residents may have disregarded benefits, income or capital which could be used to meet any shortfalls.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and

which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Hague: None.

SCOTLAND

Anti-Social Neighbours

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what powers are available to *(a)* local authority housing departments, *(b)* Scottish Homes, *(c)* housing associations, *(d)* housing co-operatives, *(e)* private sector landlords and *(f)* owner-occupiers to deal with anti-social behaviour by neighbours; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In many cases, anti-social behaviour by neighbours will amount to nuisance. Local authorities, Scottish Homes, housing associations and housing co-operatives have powers under section 47 of, and part I of schedule 3 to, the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 to raise proceedings for the recovery of possession of one of their houses including where a tenant, or any one of joint tenants, or any person residing or lodging with him or any sub-tenant of his has been guilty of conduct in, or in the vicinity of, the house which is a nuisance or causing an annoyance to others. Recovery of possession can also be granted where a tenant has been convicted of using the house, or allowing it to be used, for immoral or illegal purposes.

Local authorities also have powers under section 58 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 to deal with noise from premises which they consider amounts to a nuisance. In this case, noise also includes vibration.

Private sector landlords have powers to raise proceedings to recover possession of their houses under section 11 of, and schedule 2 to, the Rent (Scotland) Act 1984 and section 18 of, and schedule 5 to, the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988. Private sector leases may also contain a condition under which the tenant agrees not to cause nuisance or annoyance to neighbours, and I believe that such conditions are common.

Owner-occupiers can go to court to seek an interdict against a nuisance beginning or continuing, and damages where they have incurred loss.

On 22 February, the Scottish Office published a good practice note on tenancy management which described the legal and management remedies which are available to landlords to deal with problems arising from anti-social behaviour. I also announced on 22 February the award of a grant to the Chartered Institute of Housing to undertake research into current practice in dealing with anti-social behaviour and to identify examples of good practice among public sector landlords.

On 3 March, I announced that we would be consulting widely on a proposal which has been put to me, in the context of anti-social behaviour, for probationary tenancies. I expect to seek views on this in the near future. In making this announcement, I made it clear that I retain an open mind on action which might be required to help to deal with anti-social behaviour.

Farm Conservation Grants

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many farm conservation plans, so far approved in the Shetland Islands environmentally sensitive area scheme, involve payments in the *(a)* £0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,001 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,001 to £3,000, *(d)* £3,001 to £4,000 and *(e)* £4,001 to £5,000 bands;

(2) how many farm conservation plans, so far approved in the Cairngorm Straths islands environmentally sensitive area scheme, involve payments in the *(a)* £0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,001 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,001 to £3,000, *(d)* £3,001 to £4,000 and *(e)* £4,001 to £5,000 bands;

(3) how many farm conservation plans, so far approved in the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area scheme, involve payments in the *(a)* £0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,001 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,001 to £3,000, *(d)* £3,001 to £4,000 and *(e)* £4,001 to £5,000 bands.

Mr. Lang: The information, in the format requested, based on the total payments scheduled in each five-year farm or croft conservation plan is set out in the table:

	(a) £0–£1,000	*(b)* £1,001–£2,000	*(c)* £2,001–£3,000	*(d)* £3,001–£4,000	*(e)* £4,001–£5,000	*(f)* £5,001 and over
Shetlands Islands	—	—	1	1	—	7
Cairngorms Straths	—	—	1	—	—	9
Argyll Islands	—	—	—	—	—	13

Opencast Coal Mining

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* all existing opencast coal sites in Scotland, *(b)* all sites for which planning consent has been granted and *(c)* any further sites which are either subject to planning applications or which have otherwise been drawn to the attention of his Department.

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Existing opencast coal mining sites in Scotland, by region:

Central
Auchengean West
Blackrig
Fencehillhead
Greyrigg
Ladywell
Lower Redbrae
Saline Park Wood
South Roughcastle

Dumfries and Galloway
Crawick

Fife
Braehead
Cairncubie
Cotton Farm
Halbeath
Mooreland

Prathouse
Westfield Link
Woodbank (Windygates)

Lothian
Blindwells Extension
Chesterswood Extension
Northrigg Phase W
Oxenfoord
Rosslynlee

Strathclyde
Airdsgreen
Auchline Mine
Biggar Road
Birneknowe
Catcraig
Chalmerston
Dalquhandy
Damside
Drumbow
Easter Baton
Easter Baton (West)
Easter Fortissat
Edge Farm
Glenbuck
Greenland Moss
Greeside Farm
Heckler's Yard
Laigh Riggend
Legbrannock Farm
Morningside (Torbush)
Mossband Farm
Piperhill
Royal George
Skellyton Farm
Smiths Farm
Townhead Farm
Viaduct West
Waterloo
Windyedge
Woodsethead

Tayside
Lambhill Remainder
Leuchars Wood

(b) Information about specific planning consents is not held centrally.

(c) Two applications are currently before the Secretary of State on appeal against the planning authorities' decision; these are Greenhead Moss and Wester Mosshat farm, both in Strathclyde. The following prospective opencast coal mining sites were identified in Scotland during the privatisation of the British Coal Corporation.

Central
Aitkenhead

Dumfries and Galloway
Glenmuckloch

Fife
Greenbank

Strathclyde
Broken Cross
Chalmerston North
Drumshangie
House of Water, Cumnock
Ladylands
Leadloch
Powharnal
Spireslack
Gasswater
Glentaggart
Grievehill
Pennyvenie
Watsonhead
Wilstontown

NHS Trust Chief Executives

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if NHS trust chief executives are bound by the same rules concerning public statements as are their staff; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Rules of individual conduct are a contractual matter between an employee and the employing trust.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance is given to the chairmen and chief executives of NHS health boards and trusts concerning public political comments; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is one of the conditions of appointment of chairmen of health boards and NHS trusts that they should not make political speeches on matters affecting the work of their board. The conditions of employment of NHS trust chief executives and board general managers of health boards are a contractual matter between an employee and the employer.

Kynoch Group plc

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance was given by his Department to Messrs Kynoch of Keith within the past 10 years.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* None. The Scottish Development Agency and later Scottish Enterprise took equity investment in Kynoch Group plc, formerly G and G Kynoch plc. This was an operational matter within the delegated authority of these two bodies.

Water and Sewerage Directors

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the present salaries of each of the local government directors and depute directors responsible for water and sewerage in Scotland; and what are the annual expenses paid to each of the councillors involved with water and sewerage committees in their duties on those committees.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* From the information held centrally, it is not possible to provide information on the precise salaries of the directors and depute directors of water and sewerage. We believe that most directors of water and sewerage are paid in the broad range of £50,000 to £65,000. One earns in excess of £80,000.

No information is available about the expenses paid to councillors serving on water and sewerage committees, as these are matters for local authorities to decide.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local government directors and depute directors have responsibility for water and sewerage services in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* There are 12 directors and 14 depute directors with responsibility for water and sewerage services in regional and island councils. In addition, there is one director and one depute director in the Central Scotland water development board which is responsible for bulk supplies of water.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible, in 1994 giving, in each case, the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* In 1994 my Department published two Command Papers. In addition, a wide range of other documents including consultation documents and pamphlets was issued. Detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In respect of those publications published by HMSO, all costs are borne by HMSO, which aims to recover these from sales revenue.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of underspend on planned projects by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in the current year; and whether consideration has been given to the allocation of these resources to the funding of the joint European torus programme currently financed by the Highland regional council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* I understand that there has been some slippage on Highlands and Islands Enterprise projects in the current year. However, assurances have been received from Highlands and Islands Enterprise that it will draw down its total grant in aid this year and that these funds are fully committed.

Long-stay Mental Hospitals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to collect information about the number of long-stay mental hospitals which have trust status.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 6 February 1995, *Official Report,* column *73.*

Information about the number of long-stay mental hospitals is available from the Scottish health service costs book published by the information and statistics division, directorate of information services, the NHS in Scotland. A copy of this publication has been placed in the Library of the House.

Sleeper Services

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what were the gross revenues and gross costs of the sleeper services to Carlisle and Fort William in 1992–93 and 1993–94; and what is the estimate for 1994–95;

(2) pursuant to his oral statement of 8 February, to the Scottish Grant Committee, *Official Report,* column 2, if he will provide details of the calculations of the costs per passenger on the Fort William and Carlisle sleeper services; and what has been the passenger loading on the sleeper services for the same financial years.

Lord James-Hamilton *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* Responsibility for railways throughout Great Britain rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Information on the operation of sleeper services is a matter for British Rail and the Franchising Director who have provided the following figures. The approximate gross costs, excluding the fixed element of track access charges, and gross revenues of the sleeper and night motorail services to Fort William and Carlisle are as follows:

£ million

	Costs	*Revenue*
Fort William	3.7	1.0
Carlisle	0.6	0.4

The figures relate to 1993–94 passenger numbers but have been uprated to 1994–95 price levels. They also reflect an assessed provision for new charging systems such as rolling stock leases. No figures are available for 1992–93 and 1994–95.

The calculations of the subsidy per passenger on the Fort William and Carlisle sleeper and motorail services noted by me in my oral statement to the Scottish Grand Committee on 8 February, were derived from the attributable subsidy—approximately £2.7 million and £200,000 for the Fort William and Carlisle services respectively—divided by the number of passengers in 1993–94.

The passenger loading figures for the sleeper services are as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*
Fort William	14,600	14,600
Carlisle	6,700	5,700

No estimates are available for 1994–95.

WALES

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years: and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Redwood: One—Sir Richard Lloyd Jones, who retired in August 1993. He was subsequently appointed chairman of the Staff Commission for Wales, and the advisory committee which preceded it, for 1.5 days a week at £15,900 per year, and as chairman of the Arts Council for Wales for 2 days a week, for which he receives no remuneration.

HEALTH

Blood

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial structures exist between regional and district health authorities and the National Blood Authority for meeting variations in general trends in demand and supply of blood in the national health service; and what are the current price levels for blood transferred between them.

Mr. Sackville: National health service hospital trusts' contract with blood transfusion centres for the supply of blood, and fluctuations in supply and demand, are managed through the contracting process. Handling charges, which cover only the local transfusion centres' operating costs, are paid by hospitals for blood supplied. Handling charges are also paid for transfers between transfusion centres at a standard rate. There is never any charge for the blood itself which is freely given by our volunteer donors.

Organ Donor Register

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the national health service organ donor register was established; how many people have registered with it; when the register will come into operation; and what proposals she has to promote public awareness of it.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service organ donor register was launched on 6 October 1994. More than 700,000 people have joined the register. The register is already fully operational. This month we launched an advertising campaign in England in addition to ongoing publicity initiatives.

Note: Around 440,000 of these were transferred from the existing Lifeline Wales register.

Community Care

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from local authorities regarding the increased demands for community care since the implementation of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Bowis: Some local authorities have cited the popularity of the policy as a reason for increased demand for community care as a factor which is placing their services under pressure. It is for authorities to manage such factors within the context of the increased resources which we have made available for community care.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consultation takes place between the NHS and local authorities to determine the needs of particular areas for community care;

(2) how much has been saved in the NHS by the recent allocation of community care responsibility to local authorities.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 13 December 1994 at columns *615-16*.

Smoking

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when smoking was last discussed at the EU Health Minsters' Council.

Mr. Sackville: On 22 December 1994.

Patients (Deaths)

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she intends to hold an investigation into the recent deaths of patients at Kneesworth psychiatric hospital.

Mr. Bowis: No. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 8 February at column *271*.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she intends to take to reduce the number of deaths of patients undergoing psychiatric care.

Mr. Bowis: In the White Paper, "The Health of the Nation" we set a target to reduce the suicide rate of severely mentally ill people. A number of central initiatives designed to improve existing mental health services will complement local action to reduce the suicide rate among severely mentally ill people. These include the various measures in the ten point plan that we announced in August 1993 and the issue of the "Mental Illness Key Area Handbook" to all managers of national health service and local authority mental health services. The revised edition of the handbook provides a number of examples of interventions which may help to reduce suicide rates.

Many of the measures being taken to reduce deaths from suicide among severely mentally ill people should also help to reduce the number of other premature and preventable deaths of patients undergoing psychiatric care.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many actions for medical negligence have been issued against the Fallodon hospital in Leeds, and Leeds Private Hospitals Ltd.

(2) what action she is taking in response to claims for medical negligence against the Fallodon hospital in Leeds and Leeds Private Hospitals Ltd.

Mr. Sackville: In the private sector, any question of medical negligence is a matter between the parties concerned.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it a condition of any licence given to a private hospital that adequate insurance against medical negligence claims is obtained by that hospital;

(2) what requirements are placed on private hospitals to insure themselves against claims for medical negligence.

Mr. Sackville: Any question of medical negligence is a matter between the parties concerned.

Waiting Lists, West Midlands

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons additional resources made available in the present and forthcoming financial years for the West Midlands waiting list initiative are not being incorporated into district health authority budgets; and if she will make a statement on the impact of this on the

scale of the redundancy programme in South Birmingham health authority.

Mr. Malone: The allocation of resources for the West Midlands waiting times initiative is a matter for West Midlands regional health authority and I refer the hon. Member to Mr. Bryan Baker, chairman of West Midlands RHA, for this information. The redundancy programme in South Birmingham, and any possible impact that the waiting times initiative may have on this, is a matter for South Birmingham health authority and the hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Bryan Stoten, chairman of the authority, for further details.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of the West Midlands waiting list initiative in 1996–97.

Mr. Malone: West Midlands are to be congratulated on the excellent progress that they have made in reducing waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment for their residents. I look to local purchasers and providers to build on this success in the future.

Fallodon Hospital, Leeds

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been submitted to Leeds Healthcare regarding the Fallodon hospital and Leeds Hospitals Ltd.

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for Leeds Healthcare. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Pam Smith, chairman of Leeds Healthcare, for details.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will order an inquiry into the standards of health care provision at the Fallodon hospital and Leeds Private Hospitals Ltd.

(2) what representations she has received regarding the Fallodon hospital in Leeds.

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for the Fallodon's registration under the Registered Homes Act 1984 rests with the health authority. A number of concerns have been raised with the Department in relation to the Fallodon's approval by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967 to provide treatment for termination of pregnancy. All were fully investigated. Improvements were required and implemented and the Fallodon continues to be approved under the Act.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she is taking to encourage bone density scanning for osteoporosis.

Mr. Sackville: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Cumberlege, announced on 31 January that she had accepted the recommendations contained in the report of the Advisory Group on Osteoporosis, copies of which are available in the Library. She wrote to the chairmen of all national health service bodies drawing their attention to the recommendation that bone densitometry should be available to assist clinical decision-making for certain patients identified as being at high risk. My noble Friend will also be discussing this aspect, and the report more generally, with regional chairmen.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the extent to which the current NHS system meets the Government's objective to promote the development of the domiciliary day and respite care services to enable people to live in their own home wherever feasible and sensible.

Mr. Bowis: Recent guidance, HSG(95)8, on national health service responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs reiterated the important responsibilities of the NHS to arrange and fund a full range of services to meet people's continuing health care needs. As well as continuing in-patient care the guidance included important responsibilities for rehabilitation, respite health care and community health and primary care services for people at home or in residential care homes. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people are currently under domiciliary day and respite care; and how many are in full nursing home facilities.

Mr. Bowis: The centrally available information on day and domiciliary services arranged by social services authorities shows that in a sample week in September 1993 there were estimated totals of 435,000 households in England receiving home help or home care where the oldest resident was aged 65 or over, 123,000 attendances at day centres by people aged 65 or over, and 287,000 people—nearly all aged 65 or over—had meals either delivered to their homes or served at luncheon clubs. Information is not available centrally about how many individuals were receiving services arranged by social services authorities.

The number of local authority supported residents aged 65 and over in short-term placements in either residential care or nursing homes, many of which will be for respite purposes, was 11,000 on 31 March 1994.

Information on all registered nursing homes is that there were 132,200 nursing home beds occupied by people aged 65 or over in 1993–94.

Dental Practitioners

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when she expects to recover the average overpayment from each general dental practitioner;

(2) what proposals she has to require general dental practitioners to repay the average overpayment to the Government.

Mr. Malone: The Green Paper, "Improving NHS Dentistry", states that the issue of past overpayments to dentists is one that needs to be addressed. The Government have been reviewing the issue as part of their consideration of the way forward following the Green Paper.

Maternal Mortality

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of maternal mortality there have been following births in the Dewsbury area for *(a)* home confinements and *(b)* hospital births in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Maternal deaths of women (ICD 630–676[1] aged 16–50 for Dewsbury district health authority, 1983–1992

Year	*Number*
1983	1
1984	0
1985	0
1986	0
1987	1
1988	0
1989	1
1990	0
1991	1
1992	1

[1] ICD 9 codes 630–676 refer to complications of pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium. Of these, codes 647 and 648 may be considered indirect causes of the pregnancy as they cover conditions in the mother classifiable elsewhere in the ICD 9 but which complicate pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium. The remaining conditions may be considered direct causes relating to pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium.

Notes

1. There may have been other deaths among women who were pregnant or had recently given birth where this information was not given on the death certificate or was not selected as the underlying cause of death.

2. Information collected on the death certificate gives the place where the woman died. This may be different from where her child was born. Therefore it is not possible to separate deaths following births from home confinements and hospital births.

Mental Health Act 1983

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those services which an authority *(a)* can be required to provide and *(b)* can make available under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983; and if she will list the services actually available under that section.

Mr. Bowis: The specific services provided by health and local authorities under section 117 will vary according to individual needs and local arrangements. General guidance on the provision of after-care services for patients who have been detained in hospital is given in chapter 27 of the Mental Health Act code of practice, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *270–17*, when she expects to publish the numbers of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 in *(a)* NHS units and *(b)* private units.

Mr. Bowis: The Statistical Bulletin, "In-patients Formally Detained in Hospitals Under The Mental Health Act 1983 and Other Legislation, England: 1987–88 to 1992–93", is to be published shortly. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Neuroleptic Drugs

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what proposals she has to hold an inquiry into the use of neuroleptic drugs.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 8 February at column *273*.

Refugees

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports she has received of NHS trust hospitals denying treatment to refugees properly referred by their general practitioners; and what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the rules as regards eligibility for free NHS hospital care are correctly applied.

Mr. Sackville: None. It is for national health service trusts to establish whether patients are eligible for exemption from charges for NHS hospital treatment, using the Department's Manual of Guidance on the NHS Treatment of Overseas Visitors.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to review the licensing procedures of private hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: The registration of private hospitals is subject to part II of the Registered Homes Act 1984. A review of registration and inspection procedures will commence this year.

Human Rights

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will arrange for the draft convention for the protection of human rights and dignity of the human being with regard to the application of biology and medicine to be amended in response to opinion No. 184 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; when she expects the draft convention to be opened for signature; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The United Kingdom Government will take account of the Parliamentary Assembly's opinion in considering the current draft convention. No date has as yet been agreed for the convention to be signed.

The Government share with the Governments of other member states a commitment to the protection of human rights and dignity.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's policy towards the draft convention for the protection of human rights and dignity of the human being with regard to the application of biology and medicine; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: My Department will continue its involvement in the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Bioethics, which is drawing up a draft convention for the protection of human rights and dignity of the human being with regard to the application of biology and medicine for consideration by the Council of Ministers. This involvement will reflect the United Kingdom Government's firm commitment to the protection of human rights.

Prescribing Incentive Schemes

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about payments to general medical practitioners under the 1993–94 national practice based prescribing incentive schemes.

Mr. Malone: The schemes have been successful in encouraging cost-effective prescribing. Payments due to those who qualified under the 1993–94 schemes have been authorised on an extra statutory basis. Similar arrangements will apply to payments in respect of 1994–95 schemes. The total amount paid on this basis—estimated at £1.7 million in 1994–95—will be included in family health services authorities summarised accounts.

Continuing Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her estimate of the cost to the National Health Service of providing continuing care for each year from 1979 to 1996;

(2) what is her estimate of the number of people in need of continuing care as provided by the national health service in each year from 1979 to 1996.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 19 December 1994 at column *1147*. The number of people in need of continuing care is not available centrally.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what steps she will take to monitor health authorities investment in continuing care provision; and how she will ascertain which health authorities are under-providing.

Mr. Bowis: The National Health Service Executive and social services inspectorate will work closely with authorities to ensure that the guidance is fully implemented. As part of this process, health authorities will be required to include managing any re-investment in their timed and costed plans which will be in place by 1 April 1996.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances patients will be able to challenge the criteria applied by the health authority to decide their entitlement to national health service continuing care.

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities must consult and fully involve local authorities, all general practitioners, national health service and independent providers and representatives of users and carers in drawing up local eligibility criteria.

From April 1996, a patient or his or her family and any carer can ask the health authority to review the decision on entitlement to national health service funded continuing health care if they do not believe that the health authority's eligibility criteria have been applied correctly.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances a patient in need of continuing care as provided by the national health service can be placed in a nursing home.

Mr. Bowis: It is for health authorities to arrange and fund a full range of services to meet the continuing health care needs of their local population. They may purchase such care from national health service hospitals or other facilities, including nursing homes. If a patient meets the

eligibility criteria for continuing NHS in-patient care but a bed is not available within the health authority's contracted provision, agreement for an extra-contractual referral to another hospital or nursing home should be sought.

Home Helps

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority home helps there have been per 1,000 population in each year since 1979.

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is shown in the table.

Table: Whole time equivalent (WTE) home helps employed by local authorities, 1979–1993 England

At 30 September	*WTE home helps per 1,000 population*[1]
1979	0.96
1980	1.00
1981	0.99
1982	1.01
1983	1.05
1984	1.08
1985	1.10
1986	1.13
1987	1.19
1988	1.20
1989	1.18
1990	1.16
1991	1.13
1992	1.12
1993[2]	1.05

[1] Home helps employed by direct service organisations or by independent organisations under contract to local authorities are not included.

[2] The statistical return collecting details of local authority staffing was very substantially revised in 1993 and this may have affected comparability with earlier years.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which permanent secretaries have left her Department's employment in the past five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Sackville: Sir Donald Acheson and Sir Duncan Nichol have retired as permanent secretaries in this Department in the five years from 1 March 1990. Ministers appointed Sir Donald Acheson to chair the Home Office Health Advisory Committee to the Prison Service in 1992. Ministers have not offered Sir Duncan Nichol any public appointments.

Operations

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the health services management centre of the University of Birmingham questioning the value of a number of operations commonly performed on patients; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: No such representations have been received.

Staff Relocation Expenses

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on staff relocation expenses in each year since 1990–91 by region.

Mr. Malone: This information is not separately identifiable within the annual accounts or annual financial returns of health authorities and national health service trusts.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Women Directors

21. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives his Department is taking to increase the number of female directors in Britain's industrial companies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: It is for the board and shareholders of companies to choose directors, not Government.

Company Assistance (Midlands)

22. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what concerns have been raised by companies and firms in the midlands about the provision of assistance to them by his Department.

Mr. Eggar: The Department deals with a large number of companies in the midlands on a daily basis on a wide variety of issues.

Telecommunications

23. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies his Department has conducted on the relative costs of telecommunications services in the United Kingdom and other European Union countries.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department has studied the overall competitiveness of United Kingdom telecommunications infrastructure, including costs. We also monitor studies by outside bodies. These studies show that UK telecom costs are amongst the lowest in Europe.

Jaguar X200

24. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with Jaguar concerning financial assistance for the X200 project.

Mr. Heseltine: I have been keeping in very close touch with the top management in Ford and Jaguar as their plans for the X200 project have developed.

The company has not yet decided whether to go ahead with the project or, if it does, where the car would be manufactured.

I am of course keen to maximise the prospects of the project being located in the United Kingdom.

Internet

25. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what use his Department is making of the Internet super-highway.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department recognises the value of the Internet as a means to share information and develop contacts at a national and international level. We are already making use of its facilities for electronic mail, and to obtain and provide information, and I have instigated a programme to consider and develop the Department's usage from a strategic perspective.

My E-Mail address is Taylor@mintech.demon.co.uk

Private Mines

26. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with private mine owners regarding terms and conditions of service for miners since privatisation.

Mr. Page: None. These are matters for the employers and their employees.

Electricity Companies

27. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice his Department has given to the Director General of Electricity Supply concerning the consequences on prices of the high remuneration of directors.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has given no advice to the Director General of Electricity Supply regarding these matters.

Trade Deficit

28. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade by how much the United Kingdom deficit with countries outside the EU changed in 1994; and to what factors he attributes this.

Mr. Ian Taylor: In 1994, the value of the visible trade deficit of the United Kingdom with countries outside the European Union was reduced by £2.7 billion, reaching its lowest level since 1987. UK exports to these countries increased in value by 10 per cent. in 1994 while imports increased by 5 per cent. UK exports are now at record levels both in terms of value and volume. This has been achieved by UK companies manufacturing goods that are competitive in quality and price in international markets.

Steel

29. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support he is giving to the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation's campaign in favour of British-made steel.

Mr. Eggar: The Government share the ISTC's concerns about continuing subsidies to the United Kingdom steel industry's competitors in Europe. We have consistently made it clear to the Commission and other member states the importance we attach to the strict application of the ECSC rules on state aid. To assist us in this task, I have recently set up a steel subsidies monitoring committee—consisting of Government and steel industry representatives—to help gather evidence of illegal state aid and to pass it on to the Commission for action. We are also working with the UK constructional steelwork industry to improve the transparency and rigour with which sub-contracts for steelwork are awarded for public sector projects.

Manufacturing (East London)

30. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next plans to visit east London to discuss the future of manufacturing industry.

Mr. Eggar: I visited east London last Wednesday, 1 March, to discuss with local manufacturers how best to take forward the London manufacturing initiative that I launched in October.

Company Profits

31. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average proportion of post-tax profits paid as dividends in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the OECD as a whole in the last year.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: United Kingdom dividends accounted for 62.1 per cent. of profit after tax, interest and depreciation in 1992. Comparable figures are not available for the OECD as a whole, and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Ceramic Imports

32. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the growth in the import of ceramic goods from the far east.

Mr. Page: My Department has received many representations on this subject, mainly about imports from China. United Kingdom manufacturers of ceramic products want the Government to support retention of the present quotas which limit imports into the European Community while many traders and retailers argue strongly that they are unjustified on economic grounds and should be removed.

Information Society

33. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the recent G7 meeting of Technology Ministers on the information society.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 2 March 1995, *Official Report* columns *715-16*.

Textphones

34. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department gives to businesses developing textphones and similar aids for disabled people.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Seven different types of textphones have received approval from the British Approvals Board for Telecommunications. Whilst the development of aids of this type for disabled people is obviously important, I do not believe the companies involved in these developments need special support from my Department.

Near East Trade

35. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what special efforts are being made to encourage trade with near eastern countries.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The countries of the near east include many of the top 80 United Kingdom markets and dedicated desk officers and export promoters have been appointed to cover these. Their efforts have made a

significant additional contribution to the encouragement and support of trade with the area. Regular promotional seminars are held, and we support numerous trade missions, as well as participation by United Kingdom firms in trade fairs and exhibitions.

As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, accompanied by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will be visiting the area shortly accompanied by a team of senior business men.

Coal Mines

36. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding the imposition of three-year fixed-term contracts on workers within the coal mining industry.

Mr. Page: None.

Manufacturing

37. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new measures he intends to take to revitalise the manufacturing base and its contribution to gross domestic product.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government's policies are geared towards improving the competitiveness of the whole economy, including the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing industry continues to perform strongly: the latest CBI survey shows export orders at their highest level since April 1977, and over the last year productivity has grown by almost 6 per cent. and output by nearly 4½ per cent.

Building Insurance

38. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about levels of premiums for building insurance relating to cover for terrorist attacks.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have received no representations about the levels of terrorism insurance premiums which post-date my announcement of the premium arrangements for 1995, on 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *850-51*.

Energy Demand

Mr. Stern: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his Department's latest projections of the range of future energy demand and of carbon dioxide emissions in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has today published the results of an extensive review of their prospects for future energy use in the United Kingdom and of the associated emissions of carbon dioxide, one of the major greenhouse gases.

The report, "Energy Projections for the UK: Energy Use and Energy-Related Emissions of Carbon Dioxide in the UK 1995–2020", Energy Paper No. 65 (EP65), updates the energy and carbon dioxide projections published in Energy Paper No. 59 (EP59) in 1992.

The new projections provide a framework to monitor the development and direction of energy markets in the UK; to keep track of whether the UK is on target to meet its aim of returning carbon dioxide emissions to their 1990 levels in 2000; and to inform debate on possible future carbon dioxide commitments beyond 2000.

The new figures show that, on the assumptions about the climate change programme described as follows, the outturn for carbon dioxide emissions in 2000 is expected to be between 7 and 14 million tonnes of carbon—MtC—below the Government's target for that year.

The full range of carbon dioxide projections for 2000 and later years in million tonnes of carbon is as follows.

	Energy Paper 65	*Energy Paper 59 reference scenario*
1990	158	158
2000	144–152	169
2005	154–165	182
2010	154–167	194
2015	164–182	207
2020	171–197	219

The EP59 reference scenario implied that, in order to meet its carbon dioxide commitment, the Government should aim to achieve savings of 10 MtC by the year 2000. The new projections show that, compared to the reference scenario, savings of 17 to 25 MtC are now expected to be achieved.

These savings, and those in later years, are due to the following factors.

First, the revised projections incorporate the carbon savings expected to arise from the climate change programme. The projections have been constructed on the assumption that virtually all the elements of the climate change programme set out in Cm 2427 are in place. The fiscal measures are those announced in the 1994 Budgets. It has also been assumed that the amounts of energy saved by the non-fiscal measures are the same as those assumed in producing Cm 2427.

Secondly, the revised projections reflect new assumptions about future fossil fuel prices and about the responsiveness of energy demand to the price of energy and to changes in incomes and output. They also incorporate changes in the assumptions about the way in which energy is likely to be supplied. While EP59 assumed that there would be 12 GW of combined cycle gas turbines CCGT the projections now assume that, by the year 2000, some 16 to 18 GW of CCGT will be operating. The estimates also assume, on the evidence of recent performance, that the output of nuclear generating stations will be significantly higher than was anticipated in 1992.

These various changes in supply side assumptions and in estimated demand relationships are expected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by between 7 and 17 MtC in 2000, compared with the scenario adopted for the climate change programme.

The new projections alter the previous estimates of the carbon saved by the measures in the climate change programme. In part this reflects changes arising from the 1994 Budgets, particularly relating to VAT on domestic energy. The further assumed switch from coal to gas for electricity generation reduces the carbon savings attributable to reductions in electricity demand. The new projections assume a weaker link between changes in energy prices and changes in energy demand in the domestic sector.

These changes work in different directions. Their net effect is that the savings associated with the programme of measures included in the original climate change

programme, allowing for the adjustments to the fiscal measures announced in the 1994 Budgets, would be between 8 and 9 MtC in 2000. This is what is included in the projections.

Taking account also of reduced assumptions for the Energy Saving Trust, the net effect is now expected to be between 7 and 8 MtC. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is making an announcement today on the implications of the new energy projections for UK climate change policy.

Electricity

Mr. Congdon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 1 and 20 December to the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) *Official Report*, columns *807* and *1046-47*, if he has now laid an order bringing further amendments to the Electricity (Class Exemptions from the Requirement for a Licence) Order 1990 into effect.

Mr. Eggar: I have today laid before Parliament an order which will bring into effect two amendments to the Electricity (Class Exemptions from the Requirement for a Licence) Order 1990. The first amendment will extend until March 1998 the transitional period in which companies who generated or supplied electricity before the electricity industry was vested are exempt from the requirement to hold generation or supply licences, and the second amendment will help clarify the position of on-site generators who belong to the electricity pool and supply qualifying consumers on the same site through a distribution or transmission system belonging to a third party. I have also taken the opportunity to consolidate the 1990 order and the two amending orders that were laid in April and June 1994.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of all special advisers in his Department during the period 13 June 1987 to 24 July 1989.

Mr. Heseltine: The special advisers in the Department of Trade and Industry during the period 13 June 1987 to 24 July 1989 were:

Charles Hendry
Jonathan Hill
Howell James
Peter Luff
Sir Jeffrey Sterling

Distance Selling

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress towards agreement on the European Union directive on distance selling.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The distance selling directive is on the agenda for the meeting of the Consumer Council on 30 March. The current text is broadly acceptable to all member states and the French presidency hopes to reach agreement on a common position. If a common position is achieved the directive will be submitted to the European Parliament, where the co-decision procedure will apply.

Baghdad (Trade Delegation)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the recent trade delegation to Baghdad.

Mr. Needham: The delegation went to Baghdad on its own initiative. It was not given assistance by the Government. Companies or individuals visiting Iraq with a view to discussing trade require a licence permitting them to do so from my Department. The organisers were advised of this requirement and asked to draw it to the attention of those travelling as part of the delegation. My Department has contacted known participants and will check to ensure they held, and complied with, the appropriate licences.

Post Office

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the income to the Post Office during the past year from the sale of Post Office buildings; what was the cost of establishment from new Post Office buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page: The income to the Post Office in the financial year 1993–94 from the sale of Post Office buildings was £13.5 million. The cost of establishment of new Post Office buildings is not recorded separately. Investment in land and buildings—including leased premises—in the financial year 1993–94 was £114 million. This figure includes the costs of refurbishing and adapting existing buildings.

Nuclear Review

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the implications for the future of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty will be included within the scope of his Department's current review of policy on nuclear power.

Mr. Eggar: The nuclear review is being conducted within the framework of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and of the United Kingdom's other international obligations.

Steel

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the ratio in percentage terms and the figures in tonnes of imported and United Kingdom produced steel for each year since 1979.

Mr. Page: The information is in the table:

UK steel[1] production and imports

Year	*Production[2] (000 tonnes)*	*Imports*	*Imports as percentage of production*
1979	16,816	3,859	23
1980	10,389	4,707	45
1981	12,689	3,399	27
1982	11,835	3,925	33
1983	12,259	3,429	28
1984	12,563	3,646	29
1985	13,073	3,865	30
1986	13,141	4,233	32
1987	15,011	4,391	29
1988	16,681	5,225	31
1989	16,879	5,497	33
1990	16,081	5,411	34

UK steel[1] production and imports

Year	Production[2] (000 tonnes)	Imports	Imports as percentage of production
1991	15,032	5,576	37
1992	14,902	5,465	37
1993	15,103	4,917	33
1994	15,669	n/a	n/a

Source:
Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.
Notes:
[1] Products of the steel industry as defined by the Standard Industrial Classification (1980), groups 221, 222 and 223.
[2] Includes deliveries to home market and exports.

Postal Services

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the President of the board of Trade what is the current target timescale for completing first postal deliveries in urban areas.

Mr. Page: I understand from the Post Office that the general current target timescale for completing first deliveries in town areas is between 7 am and 9.30 am.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether the target timescale for completing first postal deliveries has been altered since 1975.

Mr. Page: I understand from the Post Office that there has been no change in the target timescale for completing first deliveries since 1975.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what proportion of first-class mail is currently delivered within the first-delivery timescale as defined in 1975;

(2) what proportion of first-class mail is currently delivered within the first-delivery timescale, as currently defined.

Mr. Page: I understand from the Post Office that there has been no change in the first delivery timescale since 1975 and that information on the proportion of first-class mail currently delivered within the first delivery timescale is not available. However, taking into account that the general target timescale for first postal deliveries in rural areas is longer than in town areas, overall 88 per cent. of all classes of mail nationally is delivered on the first delivery.

Tourism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what government assistance has been given to depressed tourist areas in each year since 1976.

Mr. Page: There is no list of tourist areas to which Government assistance can be ascribed.

Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the board of Trade if he will make a statement on the distribution of investment between nuclear and non-nuclear sources of energy as sponsored or sanctioned by his Department.

Mr. Page: The distribution of expenditure by my Department between nuclear and non-nuclear sources of energy is given in "Trade and Industry 1995: The Government's expenditure plans 1995–96 to 1997–98" (Cm 2804), copies of which are available in the Library of the House. This includes information about the financing of public corporations in the energy sector: further information about their expenditure can be obtained from their annual reports and accounts, also in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations took place between *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department with (i) British Nuclear Fuels and (ii) Scottish Nuclear during their negotiations for additional reprocessing contracts and wet storage for spent nuclear fuel, announced on 28 February.

Mr. Eggar: Such contractual negotiations between British Nuclear Fuels plc and Scottish Nuclear Ltd., are a commercial matter for the companies concerned. BNFL has kept officials from the Department of Trade and Industry informed in general terms.

Mr. Terry Venables

Mr. Soley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on how a computer disk in the possession of his Department containing information on Mr. Terry Venables became public.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: It appears that the information concerned was improperly copied. The circumstances are the subject of an investigation by the police who are in consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service.

Ship Finance

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to publish the Theisen Securities report on ship finance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page: The report by Theisen consultants on the financing of sales of new ships is expected to be available soon. I will place copies in the Libraries of the House.

Konver Funding

Mr. Dover: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has obtained written confirmation from the European Commission that in the list of qualifying areas for Konver II funding, Preston is the travel-to-work area embracing Chorley and South Ribble.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* No; contrary to earlier expectations, the Commission has not yet published any list of areas in the *Official Journal*. But the list of British Konver II areas in the Government's programme, sent to the Commission on 1 March, includes Preston travel-to-work area.

Insurance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the estimated average additional costs of purchasing private insurance to protect against sickness or unemployment after October 1995 to a homeowner with a £50,000 mortgage *(a)* if they are self employed, *(b)* if they are in full time permanent employment and are not disabled and *(c)* if they are full time permanent employment and are disabled.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Insurers currently charge standard rates of about £7 for every £100 of monthly mortgage payment and do not generally charge different rates for different situations.

Following the Budget announcement on changes to social security assistance, some insurers appear to be beginning to tailor their products more specifically to individual needs. However, it is too early to say whether this will have a significant impact on costs.

DEFENCE

Job Losses

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department takes to changes to the size of the defence industry; and how many job losses have been recorded by his Department since July 1990.

Mr. Freeman: My Department monitors public announcements of job losses by United Kingdom defence contractors. Since July 1990, when "Options for Change" was announced, some 65,500 job losses have been recorded in this way.

This figure includes those announcements of which my Department is aware either through the press or by direct notification from the company. It may not include job losses sustained by smaller companies, including sub-contractors and component suppliers, which have gone unreported. It may, however, include some announced job losses which in fact relate to the civil rather than the defence business of the company concerned. The figure is of announced job losses, not all of which may yet have been implemented. It does not include jobs created in the defence industry as a result of new orders.

HMS Brazen

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions between 1 January and 31 December 1994 HMS Brazen was used to transport fertiliser from the United Kingdom to Gibraltar for use at the official service residence; what quantity was involved; and at what estimated cost.

Mr. Soames: HMS Brazen transported fertiliser from the United Kingdom to Gibraltar for use at the official service residence on one occasion between 1 January and 31 December 1994. She transported four bags of fertiliser weighing 1 cwt. each. The transport of the fertiliser incurred no additional cost, as it occupied spare capacity on a ship already planned to visit Gibraltar.

Sex Discrimination

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons documents relating to his Department's policy on sex discrimination are classified; in what circumstances they can be handed to employment appeal tribunals in cases of pregnancy dismissal by his Department; what considerations apply when they cannot be handed over; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: No special considerations apply to the disclosure in industrial tribunal proceedings of documents relating to my Department's policy on sex discrimination. Such a document would therefore be subject to disclosure if it was relevant to the issues to be determined in the proceedings and there were no other reasons such as legal professional privilege which would give the respondent cause to object to its production. In the context of pregnancy dismissal cases before tribunals, documents relating to sex discrimination policy are not considered by my Department to be relevant. This is because the only issue to be decided by the tribunal is that of quantum; the Ministry of Defence has accepted liability to compensate those service women who were unlawfully discharged on the ground of pregnancy.

Strategic Weapons Systems

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the subject areas covered in the current programme of exchanges under the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident.

Mr. Freeman: A joint official level United States-United Kingdom working group established under the Polaris sales agreement meets at regular intervals to discuss a range of technical, financial, logistics, planning and safety issues relating to the Polaris and Trident strategic weapon systems. Details of these exchanges are classified.

Atomic Control Office

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *825*, what amount of money is in the assistant chief scientific adviser (nuclear)'s intermediate higher level budget; and if he will provide an estimate, in percentage terms, of how much of this budget is spent on administration of the atomic control office, London.

Mr. Freeman: The assistant chief scientific adviser (nuclear)'s cash allocation for the current financial year is £1,285,000. It is estimated that between 5 and 10 per cent. of this will be spent on the administration of the atomic control office.

Proto II Facility

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much it will cost in total to transfer and establish the proto II x-ray simulation facility, presently at the Sandia national laboratory, to AWE Aldermaston; and what proportion of this cost is to be met by the United Kingdom Government;

(2) if he will make a statement on the proposal to transfer to Atomic Weapons Establishments (UK) the proto II x-ray simulation facility presently at the Sandia national laboratory and the plans to establish this facility at AWE Aldermaston as outlined in the United States Department of Energy fiscal year 1996 budget request for atomic energy defence activities.

Mr. Freeman: It has been decided not to proceed with the proposed transfer of the proto II facilitity to the United Kingdom.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *823–24*, if he will make a statement on the role and function of the United Kingdom person stationed at *(a)* Laurel, Maryland, *(b)* Lawrence Livermore laboratory, *(c)* Dahlgren, Virginia, *(d)* Kings

bay, Georgia, *(e)* New London, Connecticut and *(f)* Crystal city, Arlington, Virginia.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom personnel stationed in the United States as part of the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident, provide direct liaison with US strategic systems project staff, supply staff and contractors on technical, financial, logistics, planning and safety matters. The individual stationed at the Lawrence Livermore laboratory is an employee of the Atomic Weapons Establishment on a short term appointment associated with the 1958 agreement, not the Polaris sales agreement as suggested by my previous reply.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many US personnel are stationed in the United Kingdom as part of *(a)* the 1958 US/UK mutual defence agreement, *(b)* the Polaris sales agreement and *(c)* the Trident sales agreement; and where they are located.

Mr. Freeman: There is one US employee stationed at the Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston under the terms of the 1958 mutual defence agreement. There are five US employees in the United Kingdom as part of the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident. These are as follows:

London:	2
Bath:	2
Barrow in Furness:	1

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the policy of pursuing pulsed power weapons physics applications at AWE Aldermaston.

Mr. Freeman: Pulsed power physics techniques support a range of programmes at AWE associated with warhead safety, effectiveness and capability.

RAF Spadeadam

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was Royal Air Force Spadeadam's budget for each of the last five financial years.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

1991–92: £6,750,000
1992–93: £7,200,000
1993–94: £8,500,000
1994–95: £8,212,000

Information for 1990–91 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's current estimates of the numbers of operational nuclear weapons held by the other nuclear-weapon states; and what estimates his Department has made of each state's rate of dismantling of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Soames: A comparison of the strategic nuclear forces of the nuclear weapon states is given in figure 3 on page 33 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994" (Cm 2550). It would be inappropriate to publish our more detailed assessments of force holdings and dismantlement programmes.

Flying Training, Slovakia

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with the Government of Slovakia on access to flying training facilities in Slovakia for the Royal Air Force during his recent visit to that country; and what agreements have been reached on this subject.

Mr. Soames: During his meeting with the Slovakian Defence Minister on 15 February my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State discussed a wide range of issues, including possible United Kingdom military training opportunities in Slovakia. Although no agreements were concluded, our respective officials are considering ways of deepening co-operation between our two countries.

Rugby League

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provisions have been made for the Rugby League within the Royal Air Force sports board's five-day sport officials and coaches courses for 1995–96.

Mr. Soames: No bid was received from the Rugby League for its sport to be included within the Royal Air Force sports board's five-day courses for 1995–96. Along with other sports, rugby league will be allowed the opportunity to hold a course in 1996–97.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Freeman: Sir Peter Levene, Sir Michael Quinlan, Sir Kenneth Macdonald and Professor Sir Ronald Oxburgh have left the Department as permanent secretaries in the five years from 1 March 1990. Ministers have appointed them to the following positions:

Sir P. Levene
adviser to the Prime Minister on efficiency and effectiveness;
special adviser to the President of the Board of Trade;
special adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on competition and purchasing (1992 only);
special adviser to the Secretary of State for Environment (1991–1992).

Sir K. Macdonald
chairman International Military Services Ltd.

Sir M. Quinlan
trustee of the Science museum.

University Air Squadron

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the approximate annual cost of the training of Oxford university air squadron at RAF Benson; and which organisation finances these costs.

Mr. Soames: The current estimate of expenditure by Oxford university air squadron during this financial year is £436,000. This expenditure is funded by my Department with costs falling to the Royal Air Force college, Cranwell's budget.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the RAF bases which offer training to university air squadrons and the approximate annual cost of the training in each case.

Mr. Soames: A list of university air squadrons based at RAF bases and airfields, together with estimates of expenditure during the present financial year, are as follows:

University Air Squadron	*Airfield*	*Estimate of expenditure £000*
Aberdeen Dundee and St. Andrews	RAF Leuchars	536
University of Birmingham Air Squadron	RAF Cosford	549
Bristol	Colerne Airfield	758
East Lowlands	RAF Turnhouse	507
East Midlands	RAF Newton	721
Liverpool	RAF Woodvale	457
University of London	RAF Benson	1,094
Manchester and Salford	RAF Woodvale	700
Northumbrian	RAF Leeming	514
Oxford	RAF Benson	436
Southampton	RAF Boscombe Down	680
University of Wales Air Squadron	RAF St. Athan	504
Yorkshire	RAF Finningley[1]	618

[1]Should the decision be taken to close RAF Finningley, the Yorkshire UAS would relocate to RAF Church Fenton.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training facilities are available for Oxford university air squadron at RAF Benson.

Mr. Soames: At present, the Oxford university air squadron operates five Bulldog aircraft from RAF Benson. Generally, a full three year training syllabus comprises 99 hours of individual tuition on the aircraft. The squadron's working accommodation consists of a hangar, offices and a briefing facility. In addition, members have access to the infrastructure of an RAF operational base and the opportunity which that provides for training.

Operation Granby

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of RAF personnel deployed during Operation Granby was logistical and support personnel.

Mr. Soames: Over 70 per cent. of RAF personnel deployed to the Gulf were logistics and support personnel.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the British 1st Armoured Division deployed as part of Operation Granby was logistical and support personnel.

Mr. Soames: A total of 43 per cent. of the British 1st Armoured Division deployed during Operation Granby was logistics or support personnel.

Western European Union

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions his Department has proposed for the establishment of an intelligence satellite for the Western European Union.

Mr. Soames: The Western European Union is currently studying the possibilities of co-operation on a European satellite observation system. The United Kingdom is contributing fully to that work.

Excess Equipment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the receipts for the sale of excess equipment in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: The following is the information:

Financial year	*£ million*
1987–88	61.3
1988–89	59.6
1989–90	37.0
1990–91	31.0
1991–92	32.8
1992–93	48.7
1993–94	66.7
1994–95 (Forecast)	72.4

It would require disproportionate effort to establish details of receipts for previous financial years, as records are not readily available.

Land Sales

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost in each of the last 10 years for the sale of land by his Department.

Mr. Soames: The sale of land and buildings over the past ten years has benefited the defence budget by some £789 million. The cost of achieving this level of receipt, however, is only recorded for the past five financial years, including the present year, and is as follows:

1990–91: £2.9 million
1991–92: £5.6 million
1992–93: £6.3 million
1993–94: £11.2 million
1994–95: £14.7 million

These levels of expenditure do not include in-house resources as this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The increasing costs are due to larger and more complex sites being introduced into the disposals programme.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify how many violations of the no-fly zone over Bosnia have been recorded for fixed wing aircraft in each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Soames: The monitoring of air activity over Bosnia is a matter for the UN and NATO. However, we understand that there have been 59 reported violations of the no-fly zone by fixed wing aircraft in the last 12 months. These are broken down as follows:

	Number
1994	
March	2
April	2
May	0
June	6
July	2
August	3
September	9
October	4
November	6

	Number
December	2
1995	
January	0
February	23

"Small Change" Experiments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of LSD experiments called "Small Change" carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; in which years were the "Small Change" experiments conducted; how many service volunteers were tested under the "Small Change" experiments; what were the lowest and highest doses administered to service volunteers; what these volunteers were required to do under the "Small Change" experiments; how many animals were tested under the "Small Change" experiments and what types of animals were used; what was the conclusion of the "Small Change" experiments; with which countries the results of these experiments were shared; and under which defence agreement the results were shared with these countries.

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for such matters rests with the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from Graham S. Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 8 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the purpose of LSD experiments called Small Change carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; in which years were the Small Change experiments conducted; how many Service volunteers were tested under the Small Change experiments; what were the lowest and highest doses administered to Service volunteers; what these volunteers were required to do under the Small Change experiments; how many animals were tested under the Small Change experiments and what types of animals were used; what was the conclusion of the Small Change experiments; with which countries the results of these experiments were shared; and under which defence agreement the results were shared with these countries has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the treat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of that programme, an evaluation is carried out of chemicals that may be utilised by an aggressor as a chemical warfare agent.

3. Small Change, which took place in 1968, was one in a series of studies carried out to assess the effect of LSD on troops in a military setting where the behaviour of those volunteers who had been given LSD could be compared with control volunteers who had not been given LSD. No animals were used in these studies. The principal aim of the study was to assess the effects on the overall efficiency of an infantry platoon in attack when half of its personnel had been dosed with 160 µg each of LSD. The study was to determine whether the presence of volunteers who had not received LSD would:

a. Mitigate the effects of the drug on the military performance of the unit as a whole.

b. Modify the response of the individual members of the unit to the drug.

4. Twenty eight volunteers participated in Small Change; fourteen received doses of 160 µg LSD in water. The volunteers were required to perform anti-terrorist sweeps as formed sections, each sweep involving an advance over four kilometres and last about 2½ hours.

5. Small Change showed that the platoon did not discharge its functions as well as would normally be expected. Overall its performance was adequate but it would have sustained a higher number of casualties than might have reasonably been expected. Unit efficiency fell by about 10% and the role of good discipline and mutual support between drugged and undrugged soldiers in mitigating the drug effects were demonstrated.

6. The results from Small Change formed part of the technology database held by the Establishment in the area of evaluation of the potential hazard to Service personnel from possible chemical warfare agents. This information was drawn upon during the 1960s and 1970s in the agreements with our NATO allies to exchange information and so promote collaboration and cooperation in areas such as research and development in chemical and biological defence. The agreements at that time included:

a. The Technical Cooperation Programme involving UK, US, Canada and Australia which had subsumed the earlier trilateral UK/US/Canada meetings.

b. American, British, Canadian and Australian Armies (ABCA) agreement Quadripartite Working Group (QWG) on NBC defence.

c. The NATO Panel VII on chemical and biological defence.

Fraud

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *515*, if he will give a breakdown of the figure for fraud in the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. Soames: The breakdown of non-procurement fraud in my Department in financial year 1993–94 was as follows:

	£
Fraudulent encashment of payable instrument	2,000
Travel and subsistence	17,000
Misappropriation of cash	107,000
Instrument of payment received on false documentation	81,000
Theft of assets	358,000
False claim for hours worked	3,000
Other	3,000

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *516*, what were the estimated costs of fraud in the five highest value cases specified by his Department.

Mr. Soames: The estimated values of the frauds in question were as follows:

	£
Director of Ammunition (Foxley)	1,500,000
VMS (Ltd.)	150,000
Chellingworth and Singer Ltd.	1,000,000
Gateway Motor Auctions	111,000
CAS Aviation and Marine International	650,000

These figures do not, however, necessarily represent a quantifiable cash loss to the Department.

Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy in respect of the biological and toxic weapons convention review conference to be held in 1996.

Mr. Freeman: My Department is working for a strengthening of the biological and toxic weapons convention by the inclusion of appropriate verification measures. We hope to have achieved progress towards this by 1996.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department has considered to enhance the verification procedures of the biological and toxic weapons convention.

Mr. Freeman: My Department is currently giving consideration to a number of measures including declarations, visits and inspections, some of which could be at short notice, that could be included in a future verification regime for the biological and toxin weapons convention.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 9 March 1995

ENVIRONMENT

Non-human Primates

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many non-human primates are imported to the United Kingdom annually; from which nation sources; which species are involved; and what information is held about distribution throughout the country.

Sir Paul Beresford: All species of primate are listed in the appendices to the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, and are therefore subject to the import/export licensing controls contained in the convention, which is implemented throughout the European Union under regulations 3626/82 and 3418/83. In 1994, 1,999 live primates were recorded as imports to the UK under the CITES regulations. The species and countries of origin involved are shown in the table. The Department does not keep comprehensive information about the distribution of imported specimens within the UK as this is not required by CITES for most of the specimens concerned.

Species	*Number imported*	*Country of origin*
Golden lion Tamarin	2	Hong Kong
(Leontopithecus rosalia)	3	Japan
Chacma baboon	7	South Africa
(Papio hamadryas ursinus)		
Olive baboon	55	Kenya
(Papio hamadryus anubis)		
Crab-eating macaque	989	Mauritius
(Macaca fascicularis)	431	Philippines
	234	Israel
	40	China
Rhesus macaque	191	China
(Macaca mulatta)	40	USA
Cotton-top tamarin	4	Japan
(Saguinus oedipus)		
Owl-faced monkey	1	Zaire
(Cercopithecus hamlyni)		
Pileated gibbon	1	Switzerland
(Hylobates pileatus)		
Black howler monkey	1	USA
(Alouatta caraya)		

Local Government Finance

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what are his proposals for removing the current restrictions which apply to certain local authorities in the exercise of their economic development powers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have today laid before the House new regulations which will have the effect of removing from 1 April 1995 the current £10,000 limit on the amount of financial assistance which certain local authorities are able to provide to individual businesses each year under their economic development powers. All local authorities in England will now be free to decide, having regard to all their local circumstances including the resources available to them, the amount of any financial assistance which they provide to businesses.

British Gas

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions there have been with British Gas about grant aid and the development of Foleshill gas work site; if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that British Gas has reached agreement with English Partnerships about the grant required to develop phase 1 of the site and that a survey will be completed this month for British Gas to establish ground conditions on phase 2 of the site. A formal submission to the board of English Partnerships will be made shortly after that about the offer of a grant to British Gas.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make a submission to the European Commission under article 34 of the Euratom treaty in respect to the planned first shipment of high-level radioactive waste from Sellafield to Japan.

Mr. Atkins: None. Article 34 of the Euratom treaty relates to particularly dangerous experiments which are to take place in the territories of member states. The article will not apply to shipments of radioactive wastes from the UK, which will always comply with internationally agreed safety requirements.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* Ordnance Survey, *(b)* the Planning Inspectorate and *(c)* his Department.

Sir Paul Beresford: Line managers are required to monitor the level of sick leave taken by their staff and to take action where this gives cause for concern. Continuing failure to achieve the required standard of attendance can lead to medical retirement or dismissal. Where officers require help, the services of the welfare division are available. We can also call on specialist counselling services, and the civil service occupational health service to provide advice.

The Department has also hosted exhibitions and publicised events such as the Health Education Authority's "Look After Your Heart" campaign, together with a health screening programme.

Office of Water Services

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will permit Ofwat to make appropriate charges when asked to give advice in other countries on water privatisation and the role of the regulator; and if he will make a statement on the basis on which charges are permitted.

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that Ofwat, as an independent non-ministerial Government Department, follows the normal Treasury accounting guidance on charging practices for Government Departments.

Bathing Water Directive

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will oppose a review and upgrading of the bathing water directive, as proposed by the European Commission.

Sir Paul Beresford: Our objective in the forthcoming negotiations on the Commission's proposal will be to ensure that the revised bathing water directive concentrates on essential quality and health parameters, is cost-effective, based on up-to-date science and meets the requirements of subsidiarity.

South West Water

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the projected cost of the reference by South West Water to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, following the limits imposed by Ofwat on water charging in the south-west.

Sir Paul Beresford: The costs of the reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission of the determinations in respect of South West Water Services Ltd. will be borne by that company, in accordance with the terms of its appointment, but these costs cannot be taken into account in setting price limits. The MMC cannot at this stage estimate with any accuracy what those costs will be.

TREASURY

Bank of England Profits

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much profit has been made by the Bank of England in each of the last four years; and what happens to such profits.

Mr. Nelson: The profits of the banking department of the Bank of England for the last four years were:

		1990–91 £ *million*	*1991–92* £ *million*	*1992–93* £ *million*	*1993–94* £ *million*
		161.8	166.2	88.3	120.2
The profits were accounted for as follows:					
(i)	Tax	18.1	30.9	12.1	24.4
(ii)	Paid to the Treasury	81.5	67.7	38.1	48.4
(iii)	Retained by the Bank	62.2	67.6	38.1	47.4

In addition, the profits of the Bank's issue department from the issue of bank notes, which were all paid to the Treasury were:

1990–91 £ *million*	*1991–92* £ *million*	*1992–93* £ *million*	*1993–94* £ *million*
2,546	1,875	1,556	1,117

This information is published in the Bank's annual report and accounts, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Nelson: Figures relating to the number of staff who applied for career breaks over the last five years are unavailable. The number of staff from my Departments and agencies on career breaks during the period requested is 100 men and 2,224 women.

The total number of staff from my Departments who have had their employment terminated in the last five years is 438. No staff on a career break had his or her employment terminated.

Import Penetration

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of the last three increases in interest rates on import penetration.

Mr. Nelson: Import penetration depends on a variety of factors, including price competitiveness, domestic demand and capacity. Recent increases in interest rates were aimed at ensuring permanently low inflation and sustainable economic growth, thereby providing a stable climate within which British industry can compete successfully in both domestic and overseas markets.

Tourism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the numbers of jobs *(a)* lost or *(b)* gained by changes in the balance of payments in tourism between 1976 and 1993.

Mr. Nelson: HM Treasury has made no such estimate.

Convergence Programme

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to update the convergence programme produced by the United Kingdom in February 1994.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A revised convergence programme is today being submitted to the European Commission. Copies of the programme are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Incapacity Benefit

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances it is envisaged that

people receiving incapacity benefit will be taxed at source; and how many people he estimates this will effect.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* It is estimated that there will be over 300,000 new recipients of incapacity benefit in 1995–96, of whom about 200,000 are expected to have an income tax liability. Tax will be deducted under pay-as-you-earn in one of two ways. For most recipients—who have some taxable income other than their benefit—tax will be deducted by adjusting the tax code applied to that other source. For those who do not have another source of taxable income—about 10,000 recipients—tax will be deducted from their benefit by the Benefits Agency.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Exchequer of raising the personal allowance by an amount equivalent to the blind person's allowance for people receiving disability living allowance at a rate equal to, or greater than, the middle rate of the care component of that allowance.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* The estimated revenue cost in 1994–95 of such a change is £20 million.

Allowances

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people currently receive *(a)* the married couple's allowance, *(b)* the additional person's allowance, *(c)* the widow's bereavement allowance and *(d)* the blind person's allowance.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Latest estimates are in the table:

Numbers benefiting from allowances in 1994–95

	Thousands
Married couple's allowance[1]	10,500
Additional personal allowance	750
Widow's bereavement allowance	120
Blind person's allowance	30

[1] Number of married couples with one or both partners benefiting.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if related allowances such as the adult and child dependency allowance will be treated as part of the income of the recipient of incapacity benefit once the benefit becomes taxable; and in how many of these cases taxing the recipient of incapacity benefit will render that person eligible for income support.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Incapacity benefit, including age-related additions and adult dependency increases, paid to new claimants after 13 April 1995, will be liable to income tax. Child dependency increases will not be liable to income tax. It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the number of recipients of incapacity benefit with an income tax liability who will be eligible for income support, as a result of taxing the recipient.

Financial Institutions

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if all individual traders in City financial institutions are required to have individual trading position limits set by their institutions, under Bank of England regulations, or under other regulations.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Both the Bank and the Securities and Futures Authority require the management of relevant institutions to have limits on overall trading positions and, where appropriate, to monitor and record exposures against them.

Barings

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement on Barings of 27 February, *Official Report*, column 693, what he has to add to his statement in respect of his comment that the unauthorised derivative positions in Barings Singapore were built up in a matter of days; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* I have nothing to add to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer told the House on Monday 27 February. He has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the responsibilities of Mrs. Lisa Leeson within the back office of Barings Singapore; and if they included the settlement of derivative trades undertaken by traders within Barings Singapore.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* This is a matter for Barings.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the trading limits imposed upon Mr. Nick Leeson of Barings Singapore by Barings.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* None at the moment, but as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer told the House on Monday 27 February, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the dates on which the large unauthorised derivative positions build up recently by a trader at Barings in Singapore first became known to *(a)* Barings managers in Singapore, *(b)* Barings managers in the far east, *(c)* staff in the London office, *(d)* Barings management in London, *(e)* staff at the Bank of England, *(f)* staff at Her Majesty's Treasury, *(g)* the Governor of the Bank of England, *(h)* himself and *(i)* the Prime Minister.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* I do not have the information on *(a)* to *(d)*. For *(e)* to *(i)* the date in each case was Friday 24 February.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what occasions Barings London treasury department, or any other entity within Barings London, arranged funding for any of the recent unauthorised derivative positions initiated by a trade at Barings in Singapore;

(2) on what date a team of staff from Barings in London flew to Singapore to investigate the large derivative positions which were recently taken by a trade in Barings Singapore and which resulted in the collapse of the bank.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answers 6 March 1995]:* As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the

Exchequer told the House on Monday 27 February, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what regulations exist to control the percentage of contract open interest which may be accounted for by any one trader or entity, on the futures exchanges in *(a)* London, *(b)* Tokyo, *(c)* Singapore and *(d)* Chicago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The answers are as follows:

London:

there are no limits on the open positions that may be taken by persons dealing on recognised investment exchanges in London. Transactions on the London, International Financial Futures and Options Exchange, LIFFE, the London Commodity Exchange, LCE, the International Petroleum Exchange, IPE, and the London Metal Exchange, LME, are cleared through members of the London Clearing House, LCH, which regularly monitors its members' margin requirements against their capital. The LCH and the four exchanges also monitor large positions of their members at contract level. The OMLX exchange carries out a daily position and margin review of all its members.

Chicago:

two US futures exchanges based in Chicago are recognised as overseas investment exchanges under the Financial Services Act 1986. They are supervised by the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission whose regulations have included provisions for limits on open positions for a number of years.

Tokyo and *Singapore*:

there are no exchanges operating in these centres which are recognised as overseas investment exchanges under the Financial Services Act 1986. Questions about the regulations applying to exchanges in these centres should be addressed to the relevant authorities.

Civil Service

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has taken to create a more efficient, modernised civil service without demoralising the staff with job insecurity and a reduction of living standards.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* "The Civil Service—Continuity and Change", Cm 2627, and "The Civil Service—Taking Forward Continuity and Change", Cm 2748, explain what measures have been taken, and will be taken, to create a more efficient civil service; emphasise the Government's intention to deal with staff reductions on a voluntary basis wherever possible; and make clear the Government's commitment to maintaining a predominantly career civil service, committed to the training and development of all staff, and to effective communication to maintain morale.

In addition, the recent consultation paper "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money: Resource Accounting and Budgeting in Government", Cm 2626, proposes potentially far reaching changes in the way Government Departments budget and account for all the resources they consume, and what they achieve with those resources, as part of the Government's commitment to improve the way that the public sector manages itself.

Tobacco Products (Distance Selling)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to prevent the promotion and distribution of tobacco products through distance selling; what measures are being or will be taken to publicise the penalties for engaging in this trade; and how many companies have been prosecuted for distance selling of tobacco products.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* Distance selling, in which duty is paid in the country of destination, is a recognised legitimate activity for which provision has been made in EC legislation, which is implemented in United Kingdom legislation in the Excise Goods (Holding, Movement, Warehousing and REDS) Regulations 1992. Certain schemes which are being marketed as distance selling are being investigated by HM Customs and Excise as tax avoidance devices.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on recent British initiatives to assist the peace process in Sudan;

(2) when the next round in the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development talks on Sudan is expected to take place;

(3) what proposals are being considered at the United Nations to increase the pressure on all sides in the Sudanese war to find a peaceful solution.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We believe that the IGADD peace initiative offers the best hope of a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Sudan. We are in regular contact with the parties involved in the initiative and are encouraging them to negotiate in good faith. Consultations between the parties are continuing. No date for the next round of talks has yet been set.

Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of *(a)* the progress of the CFE treaty implementation and *(b)* the prospects for implementation of all the obligations by all signatories by the November 1995 deadline.

Mr. David Davis: So far, progress on CFE treaty implementation has been good, with almost all states achieving the required 60 per cent. target by 16 November 1994. We are actively addressing outstanding problems and hope that the treaty will be fully implemented by all states at November 1995.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number and the types of CFE treaty limited equipment which have yet to be destroyed in all CFE signatory states.

Mr. David Davis: The information is in the following table.

At November 1994, the following equipment had yet to be destroyed by CFE signatory states:

Country	Battle tanks	Armoured Combat vehicles	Artillery	Attack helicopters	Combat aircraft
Armenia	—	159	—	—	—
Azerbaijan	216	727	103	—	—
Belarus	570	434	—	—	50
Bulgaria	317	92	162	—	40
Czech Rep	132	98	147	—	—
Denmark	58	—	—	—	—
France	—	171	—	16	—
Germany	253	810	402	—	—
Greece	400	—	202	—	—
Hungary	193	—	70	—	—
Italy	53	220	82	18	—
Norway	24	—	—	—	—
Poland	380	—	281	—	7
Romania	636	421	981	—	31
Russia	1,041	897	2	39	312
Slovakia	173	74	271	—	2
Spain	26	—	24	—	—
Turkey	424	—	48	—	—
Ukraine	728	321	—	—	226
United Kingdom	62	10	—	—	—

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Russian request for a revision of the CFE treaty.

Mr. David Davis: Russia has called for revision of article V of the CFE treaty, which sets limits on the amount of treaty limited equipment in the northern and southern flank regions. We have urged Russia to use the flexibility within the treaty to meet her security concerns. We have also, with our NATO allies, stressed the importance of full implementation of the treaty's provisions.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the consequences of the Belarus decision to halt the destruction of weapons requested by the CFE treaty.

Mr. David Davis: We are most concerned by Belarus's announcement, which, if implemented, would have potentially serious consequences for the CFE treaty. We and other NATO allies have strongly urged Belarus to resume its destruction programme. We are also considering what assistance we might provide to help Belarus to fulfil its reduction obligations by the November 1995 deadline.

Intergovernmental Conference

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the British Government will be pursuing the issue of an enhanced role for national Parliaments in contributing towards the accountability of EU institutions at the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. David Davis: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in the House on 1 March:

"we shall present a range of our ideas at the conference...We shall set out ways of achieving a stronger role for national Parliament".—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1995; Vol. 255, c. 1063.]

Ivory Coast

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the human rights situation in the Ivory Coast; and if he will publish the representations made to the Government of the Ivory Coast.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his question of 10 January, column *59*.

Code d'Ivoire is a multi-party democracy with functioning human rights institutions. The Ivorian authorities are well aware of the importance attached internationally to full respect for human rights.

EDUCATION

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what measures she is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Teachers Pensions Agency and *(b)* her Department.

Mr. Boswell: Sickness absence in the Department, including the Teachers Pensions Agency, is monitored and reported monthly to heads of branch. Referrals are made to personnel and welfare officers when an individual's sick leave totals give cause for concern. In addition, the Department is about to launch an initiative to *(a)* remind staff of the procedures to follow if they are sick and *(b)* encourage line managers through briefings and training to take a leading role in managing sickness absence firmly but fairly.

North Yorkshire County Council

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the number of employees in the education department of North Yorkshire county council in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The employment of individuals in the education department of North Yorkshire county council is a matter for North Yorkshire local education authority. The Department does not collect such information.

SCOTLAND

Incentive Prescribing Schemes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on the introduction of incentive prescribing schemes for non-fundholding practices; which health boards have incentive prescribing schemes already in place or definitely due to start on 1 April and how many practices and list patients will be covered.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The indicative prescribing scheme, introduced in April 1992, allows for incentive prescribing schemes to operate in each health board area. To date, no applications from health boards have been formally approved under the indicative prescribing scheme to set up incentive prescribing schemes.

Allowances

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the (i) salary, honorarium or allowance payable to and (ii) number of days, or part days, on a weekly average devoted to the performance of public duties by *(a)* the chairman and members of Scottish Homes board, *(b)* the chairman and members of Argyll and Clyde health board, *(c)* the chairman and members of the Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust, *(d)* the chairman and members of the RAH trust, *(e)* the leader of Strathclyde regional council, *(f)* the chairpersons of committees of Strathclyde regional council, *(g)* other members of Strathclyde regional council, *(h)* the leader of Renfrew district council, *(i)* the conveners of committees of Renfrew district council and *(j)* other members of Renfrew district council; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Details of allowances paid to individual members of local authorities are not held centrally. Each authority decides on its own scheme within the requirements of the Local Authorities Etc. (Allowances) (Scotland) Regulations 1991, as amended. Details of payments made to individuals are available for inspection by local electors at the appropriate council offices on request.

The information requested for the chairman and members of the other bodies is provided in the table.

	Salary honorarium or allowance £	*Estimated time commitment*
Scottish Homes		
Chairman	38,330	3 days per week
Members	6,600	2 days per month
Argyll and Clyde Health Board		
Chairman	17,700 per annum	2–3 days per week
Non-executive members	5,000 per annum	3 days per month
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust		
Chairman	19,285 per annum	2–3 days per week
Non-executive directors	5,000 per annum	3 days per month
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust		
Chairman	17,145 per annum	2–3 days per week
Non-executive directors	5,000 per annum	3 days per month

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs. Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* None.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the decision to keep closed until 2006 the Forestry Commission file No. F43/454 at the Public Record Office.

Sir Hector Monro: The file is now available for inspection by the general public at the Public Record Office.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many abattoirs there were in 1993 and 1994; and how many of these met European Community standards.

Sir Hector Monro: At the end of 1993, there were 54 licensed red meat abattoirs in Scotland, of which 27 fully met European Community standards and were approved to trade throughout the EC. Of the remainder, 17 plants were operating under a temporary derogation while upgrading towards full EC status and 10 plants were low-throughput premises.

At the end of 1994, 31 of the 49 licensed red meat abattoirs were up to the full EC standard. Ten plants continued to operate under a temporary derogation and eight plants had low-throughput status.

Social Work Trusts

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of state for Scotland what consideration he has given to the establishment of social work trusts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Guidance to local authorities has said that, in relation to community care, they should distinguish between their purchasing and providing functions. The establishment of social work trusts is one option which could assist social work authorities in developing their enabling functions.

Care Services

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will issue detailed guidelines on the criteria to be used to determine whether a person is in need of health care or social care.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In his statement to the Scottish Grand Committee on 1 March, *Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, columns 1-12, my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State announced that as part of an on-going review of all aspects of

continuing care and care in the community the Scottish Office has continued to refine the guidance that is available in this respect.

Consistent with the approach adopted by the Department of Health, to which the Scottish Office contributed, detailed guidance on the operational aspects of arranging and funding continuing care services is to be issued from the Scottish Office.

A letter issued on 1 March from the Scottish Office on this matter to directors of social work, general managers of health boards and chief executives on NHS trusts in Scotland. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

NHS Management Executive

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what examination the NHS management executive is giving to the merger of health boards and local authorities in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Salmon Roe

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he had to legalise the sale of salmon roe produced in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Interested parties will be consulted shortly on proposals which would permit trade in farmed, but not wild, salmon roe.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the allocation of the European regional development fund to each of the objective 1, 2 and 5b regions in Scotland for the current programming period.

Mr. Kynoch: The objective 1 and 2 single programming documents were approved on 29 July and 16 December respectively. Allocations from the European regional development fund are shown in the table.

Approval of the Scottish objective 5b programmes is still awaited. However, the proposed allocation for each programme from the ERDF is also shown. All allocations are at 1994 prices.

Designation	*Period*	*Area*	*ERDF mecu*	*ERDF £ million*
Objective 1	1994–99	Highlands and Islands	180.000	142.068
Objective 2	1994–96	Eastern Scotland	96.000	75.770
		Western Scotland	222.910	175.935
Objective 5b	1994–99	Borders	20.400	16.101
		Dumfries and Galloway	33.900	26.756
		North and West Grampian	28.250	22.297
		Rural Stirling/ Upland Tayside	16.875	13.319

* Exchange rate £ = 1.267 ecu.

Each area is eligible to receive further ERDF resources from Community initiatives.

Prisons (Drugs)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many drug and related finds, broken down by type of drug, were made in gaols in Scotland in each year since 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 9 March 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question on how many drug and related finds, broken down by type of drug, were made in jails in Scotland in each year since 1990.

Any prisoner found in possession of illicit drugs or injecting equipment is guilty of a disciplinary offence under The Prison and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 1994. The number of such recorded offences since 1990 are as follows:

1990–91: 749

1991–92: 845

1992–93: 838

1993–94: 895

Detailed information for these years is not available on the type of drugs found but records indicate that most of the disciplinary offences involved cannabis.

Water Authorities

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the proposed salaries and expenses for *(a)* the chairman, *(b)* the chief executives and *(c)* all other board members for the proposed new water authorities.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The chairman of the North and West water authorities will each receive £40,000 per annum while the chairman of the East of Scotland water authority will receive £24,000 per annum. The chief executives of new water authorities have yet to be appointed, but the salary of each will be around £80,000, plus a possible performance bonus to be settled each year. The other members of the new water authorities will normally receive £6,000 per annum. In all cases, expenses incurred on water authority business will be reimbursed.

Voluntary Bodies (Grants)

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has reached a decision on the allocation to voluntary bodies of grant under the special grants (environmental) programme in 1995–96.

Sir Hector Monro: I am pleased to have been able to offer 51 individual grants totalling £429,930 to 46 voluntary bodies in Scotland to assist them in carrying out their valuable environmental conservation, improvement and education work. The sums available in the special grants (environmental) programme in 1995–96 represent an increase of some 12 per cent. over 1994–95. This increase demonstrates both the value that the Government place on the work carried out by the voluntary sector, and its role in taking forward the Government's environmental objectives.

Organisation	*Grant £*
Association for the Protection of Birds	4,500
Association of Deer Management Groups	5,000
Biological Recording in Scotland Campaign	5,000
Buchan Countryside Group	3,000
CSV Scotland	18,000
Council for Scottish Archaeology	16,000
Easter Ross Rights of Way Society	800
Friends of the Earth Scotland	5,000
Game Conservancy Trust	5,000
Garden History Society	4,000
Glasgow Building Preservation Trust	10,000
Heartland FM	2,000
Heather Trust	8,000
Heatwise Glasgow	5,000
Highlands and Islands Forum	18,000
Landwise Glasgow	4,000
Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership	5,000
National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection	4,400
Planning Aid for Scotland	19,000
Plantlife	3,500
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	20,000
Rural Forum Scotland	16,000
Rural Forum Scotland/Reforesting Scotland	10,000
Scottish Bat Groups	1,730
Scottish Conservation Projects Trust	42,000
Scottish Ecological Design Association	8,000
Scottish Environmental Education Council	37,000
Scottish Environmental Forum	8,000
Scottish Farm and Countryside Education Trust	5,000
Scottish Historic Buildings Trust	11,700
Scottish Landowners Federation	4,000
Scottish Native Woods Campaign	6,000
Scottish Rights of Way Society	7,000
Scottish Scenic Trust	1,000
Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link	12,000
Scottish Wildlife Trust	39,500
Strathclyde Greenbelt Company	10,000
Sustrans (Sustainable Transport Scotland)	8,000
Treewise	5,500
Touchstone	1,500
Venture Scotland	3,300
Vision 21	4,000
Water of Leith Conservation Trust	4,500
West Galloway Fisheries Trust	4,000
Woodland Trust	5,000
Youth Clubs Scotland	10,000

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has yet determined the level of fee remission grant which will be available to parents under the assisted places scheme in school session 1995–96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is making £10.656 million available for fee remission in 1995–96. Fifty-five schools across Scotland will participate in the scheme. This funding should enable the number of pupils currently benefiting to be maintained at slightly above 3,000.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the income scale which will apply to the assisted places scheme in Scotland in school session 1995–96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: For school session 1995–96, I propose to lay regulations before the House in due course providing for progressive parental contribution for one assisted pupil in relation to family income as follows:

Part of relevant income to which the specified percentage applies	*Parental contribution (percentage)*
That part (if any) which exceeds £9,545 but does not exceed £10,378	9
That part (if any) which exceeds £10,378 but does not exceed £11,226	12
That part (if any) which exceeds £11,226 but does not exceed £12,909	15
That part (if any) which exceeds £12,909 but does not exceed £15,494	21
That part (if any) which exceeds £15,494 but does not exceed £18,872	24
That part (if any) which exceeds £18,872	33

The relevant income scale is open ended, but the remission can, of course, be given only where the parental contribution is less than the school tuition fee.

Cable Television Franchises

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those areas of Scotland which are covered by cable television franchises.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Fourteen franchises, covering 1,123,000 homes have been awarded in Scotland to date, in the following areas:

Aberdeen
Dundee and Carnoustie
Perth
Glenrothes and Kirkaldy
Edinburgh
Falkirk and Livingston
Cumbernauld, Airdie and Coatbridge
Motherwell and East Kilbride
Greater Glasgow
North West Glasgow and Clydebank
Bearsden and Milngavie
Dumbarton
Paisley and Renfrew
Greenock and Port Glasgow

The ITC is considering further local delivery operator franchises in Scotland.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Framework Document

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what complaints he has received about the non-availability of the framework document; how many copies of the document had been distributed by Tuesday 28 February; and what proposals he has to make the framework document readily available to all the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: There was enormous public interest in this document and, as a result, there was some initial difficulty in quickly meeting immediate demand.

At 28 February, approximately 60,000 copies had been distributed through post offices and approximately 40,000 through the freephone and freepost mechanisms.

The Government recognise the importance of everyone in Northern Ireland having an opportunity to consider the proposals. Copies continue to be available in the 30 main post offices and are still being issued in response to requests to the freephone and freepost systems.

Fair Employment

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the J. Hawthorne listed as a consultant in the fair employment small firms employment scheme in his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *679–80*, is the same person as James Hawthorne CBE, the head of the Community Relations Commission and the former controller of BBC Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: Yes.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many abattoirs there were in 1993 and 1994; and how many of these met European Community standards.

Mr. Ancram: All abattoirs in Northern Ireland are approved in accordance with the terms of European Community directives, laying down the hygiene, operation, supervision and structural conditions of abattoirs, so that they will meet European Community standards.

At the end of 1993, there were 16 approved red meat abattoirs, of which 15 were fully approved to trade throughout the Community and one was a full throughput premises with a temporary derogation. At the end of 1994, there were 15 approved red meat abattoirs, of which 14 were fully approved and one had a temporary derogation. Premises with temporary derogations are approved to trade on the national market.

Portaferry-Strangford Bridge

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to build a bridge linking Portaferry and Strangford village; what is the estimated cost of such a bridge; and what EU funding could be available for such a scheme.

Mr. Moss: There are no proposals to build such a bridge, which, in the absence of detailed costings, is estimated to cost between £15 million and £20 million. It is not possible to say whether European Union funding could be available without first considering a full economic and financial appraisal.

Expenditure

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent from the law, order, protective and miscellaneous services programme on *(a)* the probation service, *(b)* training schools, *(c)* grants to voluntary bodies concerned with the rehabilitation of offences, *(d)* crime prevention, *(e)* victim support, *(f)* civil defence, *(g)* civil emergencies, *(h)* elections *(i)* services in support of the security forces, *(j)* legal services, *(k)* the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights, *(l)* information services and *(m)* Northern Ireland Office administration in 1993–94 and 1994–95; and what is the estimated expenditure in 1995–96 and 1996–97.

Sir John Wheeler: The amount spent in 1993–94, forecast spend for 1994–95 and planned expenditure for 1995–96 and 1996–97 from the law, order protective and miscellaneous services programme are as follows:

		Spend 1993–94 £000s	*Forecast 1994–95 £000s*	*Planned 1995–96 £000s*	*Planned 1996–97 £000s*
A.	Probation Service	10,097	10,496	10,087	10,374
B.	Training Schools	12,017	13,173	12,316	12,540
C.	Grants to Voluntary Bodies	812	712	690	690
D.	Crime Prevention	121	239	158	165
E.	Victim Support	197	267	270	298
F.	Civil Defence	−1,154	473	368	145
G.	Civil Emergencies				
H.	Elections	1,243	1,255	1,254	1,232
I.	Services in support of the Security Forces (PANI non police pay expenditure plus NIO Security Responsibility Centre)	133,890	133,797	137,971	133,164
J.	Legal Services				
	Crown Solicitor's Office	684	1,014	927	990
	Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions	7,054	7,170	7,134	7,203
K.	Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights	227	289	254	261
L.	Information Services	1,259	1,285	1,410	1,425
M.	Northern Ireland Office Administration	756,983	755,735	715,816	718,766
This includes:					
a.	RUC Pay	478,139	480,198	477,913	499,768
b.	Compensation Agency Costs	106,689	95,338	65,257	45,287
c.	Prison Costs	141,130	147,485	143,813	144,365

Ms Mowlam: To aks the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the amount of money spent under the law and order, protective and miscellaneous services programme on criminal damages and injuries compensation in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and what is the estimated expenditure in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97.

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Compensation Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Denis Stanley. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stanley to Ms Mowlam, dated 8 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Compensation Agency, to your recent Question regarding criminal injuries compensation.

The following table details how much was spent on criminal damage and criminal damage and criminal injuries compensation in 1993–94, the forecast for 1994–95 and the current estimate for 1995–96 and 1996–97:

Year	*Criminal damage compensation £ Million*	*Criminal injuries compensation £ Million*
1993–94	67.9	29.6
1994–95 (forecast)	55.0	31.7
1995–96 (estimate)	26.0	33.8
1996–97 (estimate)	9.0	30.8

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television Licence Fee

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to seek parliamentary authority for an increase in the television fee.

Mr. Dorrell: On 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *805*, I announced that, from 1 April 1995, the fee for a colour television licence would increase to £86.50 and that for a monochrome licence to £28.50. I have today laid before the House the regulations necessary to bring these fees into force.

Whitehall Study

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what brief and limits he set for the study he has commissioned on the future of Whitehall and of its urban design consequences;

(2) what is the cost of the study of the future of Whitehall and of its urban design consequences will be published;

(3) when he expects the study of the future of Whitehall and of its urban design consequences will be published.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

Property Holdings commissioned a portfolio review last year to examine the scope for rationalising the Whitehall estate and for reuse of surplus space. Property Holdings with the Department of National Heritage also commissioned an urban design study of the Government estate in the Whitehall conservation area, which will provide day-to-day best practice advice to Departments carrying out maintenance and alterations affecting the external appearance of their Whitehall buildings. Copies of the reference for both studies will be placed in the Library of the House.

The portfolio review is on-going and the initial report was received in October 1994. It is estimated to cost up to £75,000 plus VAT, but it will not be published as it includes market-sensitive information that could affect any property negotiations resulting from the study. The design is expected to be completed by July 1995 and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House. It is estimated to cost £40,000 plus VAT, including the printing and production costs of the guide.

Children's Play

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which organisations he has invited to bid for funds to carry out work under his new arrangements for children's play.

Mr. Dorrell: I will shortly be meeting a number of organisations to discuss the new arrangements which we propose to introduce and will then invite bids for funds from these and other interested organisations.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he has taken to ensure that all children's play activities are recognised by the Sports Council for the purposes of national lottery funding.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the National Lottery etc. Act 1994, it is for the Sports Council to consider the eligibility of projects submitted to it in the light of the Act and the directions which I have issued to it. I understand that the council is considering this matter in the light of the announcement which I made on 2 March about new arrangements for children's play, *Official Report*, column *640*.

National Lottery

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to conduct research into the effect that the introduction of an instant win game by the operators of the national lottery will have on fund raising by charities, sports clubs and other organisations, especially through the medium lotteries.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no such plans.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has had with the Director General of the National Lottery with regard to placing a limit on the first prize payable in respect of any single winning ticket.

Mr. Dorrell: I have had no such consultations.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he takes to establish the accuracy of local claims regarding the origins of historical figures used in terms of tourism promotion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* It is not my function to check the accuracy of traditional associations of historical figures with specific localities.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Election Law Breaches

Mr. Straw: To ask the Attorney-General how many allegations of *(a)* fraudulent voting, *(b)* misuse of proxies, *(c)* breach of financial limits and *(d)* other breaches of election law and been (i) received by the police or the Crown Prosecution Service, (ii) investigated and (iii) prosecuted, and with what result, for each year since 1992.

The Attorney-General: The number of cases reported to the CPS with a view to investigation for election offences between 1992 and 1995 and covering both parliamentary and local government elections is a follows:

1992
101 cases
1993
30 cases (between 1 April and 31 December)
1994
61 cases
1995 (to date)
3 cases

There are no accurate figures for the first three months of 1993.

Categorisation of the cases in the manner requested by the hon. Member could be effected only through recovery from archives and scrutiny of each individual file. This would involve disproportionate cost. In 1992, there were five successful prosecutions for the personation of those entitled to vote; two of double voting; and one case of a person convicted on an eight-count indictment of theft and forgery of ballot papers and personation.

In 1993, there was one successful prosecution for a failure to return a declaration of expenses; one of making a false statement of fact about the personal character or conduct of a candidate; and one case of two offences of falsification of proxy forms. There was also an acquittal in a case of incurring unauthorised expenses.

In 1994, a case of falsification of a nomination of candidate form was commenced. The case has been committed for trial but no trial date has yet been fixed.

There is no central record of allegations received by the police but not submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Attorney-General what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Treasury Solicitor's Department, *(b)* the Serious Fraud Office, *(c)* Government Property Lawyers and *(d)* the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Attorney-General: The departments for which I am responsible are concerned about the well-being of their staff and monitor closely and investigate both individual cases and overall trends. They make every effort to control the level of sickness absences through preventive measures which include the provision of:

(a) health screening programmes;

(b) free eye tests and where necessary allowances to purchase spectacles for users of visual display units;

(c) stress awareness and management seminars;

(d) health and safety advice; and

(e) the services of a welfare officer.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Overseas Aid Policy

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister for Overseas Development will be publishing a statement about the United Kingdom proposals for improvements in its overseas aid policy at the time of the world summit for social development.

Mr. Baldry: Our objectives, policies and achievements are reviewed annually with a view to maintaining and improving the quality and effectiveness of the aid programme.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, published its 1995 departmental report on 8 March and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Baldry: Established guidelines are in place for the management of sick absence, including welfare, medical, disciplinary and inefficiency procedures which accord with best practice as recommended by the National Audit Office.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Domestic Committees

Mr. Miller: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission what recent changes have been made to the responsibilities of domestic committees.

Mr. Beith: Following discussions between Committees, the House of Commons Commission has now approved the following modifications to the responsibilities of domestic Committees which take account of the Information Committee's primary responsibility for the parliamentary data and video network and the latter's endorsement by the House:

the distribution of the clean feed within the House—from the Broadcasting Committee to the Information Committee;

annunciator services and the provision of television, video and radio channels—from the Administration Committee to the Information Committee.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what factors are contributing to the delay in connecting hon. Members to the Internet.

Mr. Waller: The Information Committee considered the proposed experimental connection to Internet on 16 and 30 January. Before the system is operational, it is necessary to finalise and award the contract, arrange certain security measures and install a dedicated link.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what assessment the Committee has made of whether it would be technically feasible to identify

electronic mail sent by hon. Members from the parliamentary data and video network via the Internet to domestic addresses and those sent to the international addresses.

Mr. Waller: While it would be technically feasible to monitor Members' Internet e-mails, there are no plans to do so. It is a long-standing tradition of the House that hon. Members' parliamentary communications are not monitored by the House authorities. Since there are no charges for Internet e-mail, there would be no bar to Members receiving and sending either domestic or international e-mail messages.

Word Processors (Training)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what facilities exist for training hon. Members on the use of word processors.

Mr. Waller: Training for hon. Members in all aspects of IT including word processors was considered by the Committee in its report "The Provision of Members' Information Technology Equipment, Software and Services"—first report, Session 1992–93, HC737—which was approved by the House on 30 June 1994. The report recommended, inter alia, the provision of a modest amount of basic on-site training which would be paid for by Members from their office costs allowance. Training in the use of the parliamentary data and video network is provided without charge to Members' office cost allowances.

Parliamentary Channel

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee what are the current arrangements for parliamentary charging for the Parliamentary Channel; when these arrangements are subject to review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The licences from the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Clerk of the Parliaments which underpin the arrangements for parliamentary broadcasting run for five years until the summer of 1996, when they will fall due for renewal. PARBUL—Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Ltd.—which is the company charged with producing the signals on behalf of Parliament, is funded by shareholdings from the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, BSkyB and the Parliamentary Channel. Funding is on a per-channel basis and the Parliamentary Channel therefore provides one sixth of the costs of the equipment and staff involved in the creation of the signals. The original agreement between Parliament and the broadcasters, which was approved by the House, provides for the broadcasters to make a contribution, via PARBUL, of roughly 50 per cent. towards the costs of the televising operation, in return for the right to make use of the signals for broadcasting purposes. No question arises therefore of any charge being payable to Parliament by the Parliamentary Channel.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee what steps the Committee is taken to ensure that the Parliamentary Channel is made available free to all electors who are connected to satellite; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Parliamentary Channel is a cable channel and is available at no extra charge as part of the basic package of channels to all subscribers to broadband cable systems. The Select Committee on Broadcasting, in its first report of Session 1990–91 on "The Arrangements for the Permanent Televising of the Proceedings of the House", recommended that the United Artists proposals for the Parliamentary Channel offered the most promising prospect for the provision of a dedicated channel. It also noted that the proposal should not be regarded as the last word, nor as excluding or pre-empting any other proposals for a dedicated channel which might come forward in the future. I am not aware of any plans for the establishment of a dedicated Parliamentary Channel receivable by owners of satellite dishes. In any case, because of the high start-up and operating costs of such a channel, it could be provided free of charge only either at a commercial loss or on the basis of a large and continuing public subsidy.

Audio-visual Resources

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will promote or fund a CD-ROM on how Parliament and British democracy works for use by schools and electors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waller: I have been asked to reply.

The question of a multi-media presentation is at present under discussion between the officers of the two Houses, and other interested parties. Various audio-visual resources on Parliament are already available from the education officer.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Newton: No member of the Privy Council Office's staff has applied for a career break in the last five years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gas Licences

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish further information about the licences which would be granted pursuant to the Gas Bill, once enacted.

Mr. Eggar: I am today publishing further information about proposed gas licences, in advance of the Second Reading of the Gas Bill next Monday. These outlines will give a clearer idea of the measures and safeguards that would be established for the operation of a fully competitive market in domestic gas supply.

The principal standard conditions are likely to include:

for *supply licences*, an obligation to supply all prospective domestic customers within their area, subject to certain technical exceptions; to publish charges; to offer a reasonable range of methods of payment to customers; to supply gas where directed to do so by the Director General of Gas Supply, to ensure the continuity of supply to customers; to make financial arrangements, such as a bond, to cover the costs which would be involved if another company had to take over supplying their

customers; to offer consumers reasonable rights to terminate contracts; to provide special services for disabled customers or pensioners free of charge; to adopt suitable methods for dealing with customers who have genuine difficulty paying their bills; to advise customers on energy efficiency; to check the background of officers authorised to enter customers' premises and provide them with official identification.

for *transportation licences*, requirements to keep separate accounts for transportation and storage business; to furnish the director with details of charges, and both the director and the Gas Consumers Council with other information; to establish standards of performance and provide compensation if they are not met; to establish a "network code" under which others may use the pipeline system; to make effective arrangements for the provision of emergency services to the public; to raise a levy, if necessary, to compensate any suppliers with disproportionate social obligations; and to obtain the director's approval before disposing of key assets.

for *shipper licences*, obligations as regards the use of pipeline systems; to assist the transporter during an emergency; to supply the director with appropriate information.

Gas Market (Competition)

Sir John Hannam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *125–27*, if he has reached any conclusions in relation to the consultation on the initial areas for domestic gas competition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The area for the first phase of the transition to a competitive gas market will cover some 500,000 gas consumers in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset.

The south-west has received by far the most support—nearly a third of all responses to our consultation document suggested the south-west as the most suitable area.

The response demonstrated widespread enthusiasm for competition in gas supply from all over the country. Local authorities and other organisations from all parts of the country—from Clydesbank to Carrick, from Devon to Dover, from Rotherham to Rugby—requested that they should be the first to benefit from competition in the domestic gas market.

The south-west fulfils the criteria set out by the Trade and Industry Select Committee and the consultation document:

it will be one of the areas that might be relatively disadvantaged by the higher transportation charges applicable;

it has a mix of rural and urban areas and a representative cross-section of types of consumers;

it is suitable for testing and necessary technical systems;

it is a clearly defined area with clear natural boundaries.

Because of the need for further consideration of technical factors, no decision regarding the second phase of the transition to competition has yet been made.

The Gas Bill published last week would provide the legislative and regulatory framework for the extension of competition in supply to 18 million domestic gas consumers in Great Britain. We have proposed that, subject to parliamentary approval of the Bill, the introduction of competition should be phased from 1996 to 1998, with the first phase in April 1996 covering some 500,000 homes, which would be extended to 2 million homes in 1997, before nationwide competition in 1998.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which EC member states permit European regional development fund grant to be accessed using wholly private sector match funding; and what are the reasons for Her Majesty's Government not permitting the same procedure.

Mr. Eggar: The Government do permit European regional development fund grant to be "accessed using wholly private sector match funding"—projects to be financed by the fund and the private sector alone. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) on 20 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *31–32*.

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the details of the models which the Government have developed and submitted to the Commission for facilitating objective 1 funding.

Mr. Eggar: I take it that the hon. Member is referring to the Government's proposals, mentioned in the reply I gave him on 20 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *31*, for facilitating private sector contributions to projects to which the European regional development fund makes grants.

I do not intend to make these proposals public in advance of the Commission's response.

They relate not only to objective 1 grants but to ERDF grants generally.

Departmental Filing Arrangements

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether filing arrangements in his Department include indexing under the names of individual hon. Members.

Mr. Heseltine: Correspondence between hon. Members and Ministers in the Department is recorded in their respective private offices in the name of the hon. Member.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether filing arrangements in his Department include indexing under named lobbying companies.

Mr. Heseltine: There is no such index in the Department.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many items of correspondence were received from the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) by Ministers in his Department on issues relating to the interests of the Al Fayeds; on what dates they were received; and how many were replied to.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* It is not the normal practice to disclose information about communications between hon. Members and Ministers.

Network Marketing

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiries are going on into the activities of companies involved in network marketing.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Since June 1994, the Department has successfully applied to the

High Court to wind up 12 companies engaged in the promotion of money-making schemes with a pyramid recruitment structure similar to that used in network marketing. However, as a matter of policy, I cannot disclose whether any current inquiries are taking place.

Pneumoconiosis Compensation Scheme

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many payments were made under the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1993.

Mr. Page: The numbers of lump sum payments awarded by British Coal under the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme in the nearest financial years were as follows:

Year	*Number of lump sum awards*
1980–81	521
1986–87	295
1993–94	263

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average level of payment made under the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1993.

Mr. Page: Average levels of lump sum payments awarded and loss of earnings allowances paid by British Coal under the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme in the nearest financial years were:

	Average lump sum payments £	*Average loss of earnings allowances* £
1980–81	781	1,183
1986–87	914	2,330
1993–94	1,640	5,850

Progression payments—supplement payments to lump sums—were introduced in 1988 and averaged £378 in 1993–94.

The estimate for average loss of earnings allowances in 1993–94 is provisional.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many payments have been made under the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme since 1974.

Mr. Page: The numbers of lump sum payments awarded by British Coal under the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme since 1974 are as follows:

Period	*Number of lump sum awards*
1 October 1974 to 2 December 1976	62,617
25 March 1979 to 31 December 1994	13,465

Figures for the period 3 December 1976 to 24 March 1979 are not readily available.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many civil servants since 4 May 1979 have left the Export Credits Guarantee Department and have within two years joined companies engaged in contracts with the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her to the same question on 8 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *314*.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* Mr. J. R. S. Guinness left the employment of the Department of Energy as permanent secretary during the five years from 1 March 1990. Mr. Guinness was appointed as part-time chairman of British Nuclear Fuels plc. No permanent secretary left the Department of Trade and Industry in the same period.

Regional Selective Assistance Grants

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the total values of all regional selective assistance grants paid to businesses in the Barrow and Furness parliamentary constituency in 1993–94 and 1994–95; and what was the average grant paid in each year.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The regional selective assistance grants which were made and accepted in the Barrow and Furness parliamentary constituency totalled £2,222,800 in 1993–94 and £135,500 in 1994–95. These projects are at a variety of stages of payment, although the average value of each offer made was £202,000 in 1993–94—this figure is influenced by one particularly large grant—and £22,600 in 1994–95.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department does not hold details on the number of staff who applied for career breaks over the past five years. However, between 1990 and 1994 the Department granted career breaks to 13 men and 263 women. None of these staff has had his or her employment terminated.

American Deregulation Initiative

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what reports have been sent by the embassy in Washington concerning the US Administration's deregulation initiative and the Bill introduced by the Republican party; and when these reports were despatched.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The British embassy in Washington has sent two reports, dispatched on 9 and 18 January 1995, concerning the "Congressional Republicans' Contract with America". The embassy brought to our attention two of the 10 proposed pieces of legislation, which collectively make up the contract, that may have deregulatory or competitiveness implications. These are the Job Creation and Enhancement Act and the Common Sense Legal Reforms Act.

Deregulation (Reporting)

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what instructions have been sent to overseas posts on the reporting of developments relevant to the Government's deregulation policies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As part of the Government's strong commitment to raising the profile of deregulation at the Community level, overseas posts were updated in February on deregulatory developments. Posts were requested to report on member states' current deregulation initiatives.

Libyan Sanctions

Mr. Stewart: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from Babcocks of Renfrew on the issue of Libyan sanctions and the export of boilers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* None.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Public Trust Office, *(b)* the Public Record Office, *(c)* HM Land Registry and *(d)* his Department.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The question partly concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executives of the three agencies concerned are best placed to provide an answer. I have accordingly asked each of them to reply direct.

Absenteeism in my Department is taken seriously by managers at all levels in the organisation. All staff are issued with a handbook which explains the Department's policy on sick absence and details what will happen if poor attendance prevents an individual from giving regular and reliable service. Managers are required to tackle sick absence constructively and promptly and this includes conducting a "return to work" interview with staff after any period of sick absence. Levels of sick absence are monitored both locally and centrally and initiatives designed to tackle areas where sick absence is highest have been introduced. In particular, my Department is currently conducting research into the incidence and causes of stress in the Department and the linked problem of stress-related sick absence.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 9 March 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your parliamentary question, listed on 28 February 1995, regarding measures being taken to combat sickness absenteeism.

The Department's central guidance is available to all Public Trust Office staff. On return from sick leave, all staff are interviewed by their managers. Managers are responsible for monitoring sick absence levels, and for taking action if these are unacceptable.

I am in the process of issuing new written guidance to managers, and a comprehensive refresher training programme is to be run shortly to support this.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 9 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary for the Lord Chancellor's Department to reply to your recent question concerning the measures being taken by HM Registry to combat sickness absenteeism. I can provide the following information.

1. Periodic health screening is carried out to assist in identifying potential health problems and providing information on healthy living.
2. Appropriately trained line managers at all levels are involved in managing attendance. Local Personal Managers oversee the operation and effectiveness of procedures.
3. There is close liaison with the Occupational Health Service over cases of concern and the Registry's own Welfare Service play an active supportive part in the well being of staff.
4. The Registry has developed a customised Personnel Information System which provides detailed information on sickness absence and its causes. This information is used to inform line managers and to further develop the Agency's sickness absence policy.
5. All staff in the Land Registry have a personal copy of the Agency's policy on staff attendance and this is publicised on a regular basis.

I do hope that this answers the point raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be any further assistance.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 8 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about measures being taken to combat sickness absenteeism in the Public Record Office.

In October 1993 the Public Record Office put in place a plan of action to combat sickness absenteeism. This included:

drafting a revised sick absence policy which has now been circulated to all staff;

Personnel Management Department providing managers with monthly reports about staff whose sick absence is a cause for concern, agreeing what action should be taken and ensuring that subsequent attendance is monitored regularly and;

Statistical data on sick absence is now compiled and analysed by Personnel Management Department and this information is circulated to managers on a regular basis. This enables managers to identify and deal with problems at an early stage.

Specific action which has been taken since February 1994 is as follows:

64 staff have been asked to discuss sick absence with their manager and agree a plan of action to improve it. Their attendance is then monitored at least quarterly and further action taken if appropriate. Personnel Management Department work closely with managers throughout this process;

17 referrals have been made to the Occupational Health Service (OHS);

8 medical retirements have been requested (6 already actioned);

4 verbal warnings have been given;

1 written warning has been given; and

3 staff have been dismissed.

International Information Super-highway

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what plans he has to ask the Law Commission to investigate the impact on British law of the international information super-highway;

(2) what efforts his Department is making to liaise with *(a)* the Governments of the other member states of the European Union, *(b)* the institutions of the European Union and *(c)* the American Government with regard to possible law reform as a result of the impact of the international information super-highway;

(3) what plans he has to increase the number of his officials working on the impact on British law of the international information super-highway;

(4) how many of his officials, at which grades and in what departmental groups, are engaged in research into the impact on British law of the international information super-highway;

(5) what research his Department is doing into the impact on British law that the international information super-highway is currently having and is likely to have in the future; and what plans he has to publish this research;

(6) what plans he has to introduce legislation to make changes to British law in the light of the impact on it of the international information super-highway.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I currently have no plans to ask the Law Commission to investigate the impact on British law of the international information super-highway. However, the Law Commission's business law team is taking part in examination, being conducted by the Department of Trade and Industry, as to whether formal requirements in English law would inhibit the use and effectiveness of electronic data interchange in its commercial application.

At present, my Department is not engaged in any liaison with the Governments of the other member states of the European Union, the institutions of the European Union or the American Government on the possibility of law reform as a result of the impact of the international information super-highway. No officials in my Department are currently involved in research into this issue. I have no immediate plans to change this situation, nor to introduce legislation to make changes to British law. However, any issues raised by the existence of the international information super-highway are being assessed, and discussed with other interested Departments, as the need arises.

Defamation

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to reverse the burden of proof in cases of innocent dissemination in defamation cases and when he plans to publish a Bill on this subject.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A Bill putting the defence of innocent dissemination of a statutory footing, and making the defence available to a wider category of defendants, is in an advanced state of preparation and a draft will be published very shortly. It is not proposed that the burden of proof should be reversed.

Judiciary (Performance Appraisal)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *572*, if he intends to introduce performance appraisal for the judiciary.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Royal Commission on criminal justice recommended the creation of a formal system of performance appraisal for the judiciary. That recommendation remains under active consideration by the Lord Chancellor, who will respond in due course.

Gerry Adams

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the case of Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein and the European Court of Justice; what United Kingdom public expenditure this has entailed to date; what estimate he has made of the potential future expenditure from public funds; and in what circumstances and under whose authority public funds are allocated in respect of this case.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Legal aid has been granted to Mr. Adams in support of his application for a judicial review of the Home Secretary's decision excluding him from entering Great Britain under the prevention of terrorism Act. The matter has now been referred by the High Court to the European Court of Justice for an interpretation of the relevant European Union law. Where a reference is made by the High Court to the European Court of Justice, legal aid automatically covers work done for the European Court of Justice element of the case.

To date, a total of £9,234 has been paid on account from the legal aid fund. No estimate has been made of the final cost to legal aid, nor do I consider it appropriate to speculate as to what the final cost might be.

In dealing with his application for legal aid, Mr. Adams was assessed on the same means and merits criteria as any other applicant for legal aid, in accordance with the appropriate regulations.

Immigration

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the current waiting time for appeals to be hear against refusal of settlement visa applications from spouses and fiancees in India and Pakistan.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Statistics are not kept by the country of origin, but where parties have indicated readiness for the appeal to be heard, cases are now being listed for hearing by the immigration appellate authorities at the hearing centres as follows:

Centre	*1995*
Glasgow	March
Birmingham	April
Leeds	April
Manchester	April
Hatton Cross, London	June
Thanet House, London	November

In view of the current lengthy waiting times in the south-east, the chief adjudicator has indicated that when notices of hearing are sent from London, the immigration appelate authorities will offer the parties the opportunity of an earlier date at one of the regional centres, if the parties are willing to travel to that centre.

Wills

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what safeguards are available to protect a bereaved person who does not wish the deceased person's will published for security or other reasons; and what is the status of the Data Protection Act 1984 in this respect.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Under section 124 of the Supreme Court Act 1981, a will is a public document.

However, anyone may apply to a district probate registrar to prevent inspection of a will. The registrar may grant the application if, in his opinion, inspection would be undesirable or otherwise inappropriate. A record of every will administered by the probate registry is kept on a computer system; the general public do not have access to this computer system and the system is fully registered under the Data Protection Act 1984.

Mr. Bryce Taylor

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report,* column *573,* who is now paying Mr. Bryce Taylor's costs.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Since there are no cost implications for the legal aid fund, the question of costs is entirely a matter for the parties concerned.

Assault Compensation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received urging, and what plans he has to ensure, that when magistrates courts award sums in compensation to be paid to victims of assault by their assailants that those amounts are paid by the court and received from the assailant by them.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Representations to this effect are received from time to time. However, if compensation were paid to compensatees directly from court funds, this would create a free loan for offenders at taxpayers' expense. If offenders defaulted, it would result in a new burden on the public purse. The proposal would also remove the element of restitution from the court's sentence. We believe that it is important for offenders to be required to repay their victims.

Magistrates

Mr. Straw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 24 February, *Official Report,* column *346,* if he will list the current political balance of magistrates for each *(a)* metropolitan borough, *(b)* London borough and *(c)* non-metropolitan district in England.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements exist to ensure the Benefits Agency treats in a confidential manner the financial information required of claimants appealing against reduced invalidity benefit on grounds of hardship; and what arrangements exist for protecting confidentiality in respect of the agency's use of a private firm to open claimants' letters containing such information.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 8 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding the confidentiality aspect of claims to Invalidity Benefit and the opening of Benefits Agency post by private sector companies.

All information received within Benefits Agency offices concerning the financial and other circumstances of customers is held in strict confidence. All Agency staff have an overall duty to protect any information that is held and to ensure it is not disclosed to anyone without the customer's consent. Any post received in connection with appeals on Invalidity Benefit entitlement will be treated in this manner.

As you may know, the Government's Competing for Quality initiative subjects public functions to competition from the private sector. As part of this initiative the Benefits Agency has market tested its accommodation and office services, which includes post opening operations. In some areas this has resulted in the Agency's post being opened by private sector contractors.

The contract specifications drawn up contain all the necessary safeguards to ensure confidentiality of information is maintained to the high standards required by the Civil Service. All staff directly involved in post opening are bound by the same stringent security and confidentiality rules. This includes each member of staff involved in post-opening being required to sign a declaration acknowledging the provisions of section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, which makes it a criminal offence to disclose personal information provided for Social Security purposes.

I am sure you will appreciate that these arrangements present many opportunities for enhanced customer service, in terms of the Agency's business as a whole.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report,* column *536,* how many of the invalidity benefit recipients are *(a)* males and *(b)* females; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Number of invalidity benefit recipients in Great Britain and Wales, at a particular time, by sex

	Great Britain		*Wales*	
Year	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
1979	504,000	106,000	58,000	11,000
1983	593,000	144,000	70,000	17,000
1987	754,000	213,000	93,000	29,000
1993	1,156,000	424,000	125,000	47,000

Notes:

1. The number of recipients figure is at June for 1979, and April for 1983, 1987 and 1993.
2. The Welsh 1979 figure may contain a small number of claimants not in receipt of benefit.
3. Figures based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the total cost of paying income support for mortgage interest in Scotland in each year since 1982–93 and *(b)* the total number of households in Scotland receiving income support for mortgage interest in each of these years.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

Year	Number of households[1]	Estimated annual cost[2] £ million
1989	15,000	19.3
1990	14,000	24.6
1991	18,000	33.1
1992	19,000	32.4
1993	22,000	32.6

Notes:
[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
[2] Estimated annual expenditure on mortgage interest is calculated as total numbers multiplied by average weekly amount multiplied by 52.
Source:
Income support statistics annual inquiries 1989 to 1993.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *623*, what estimate has been made of the housing benefit payable to the 41,960 asylum seekers receiving income support in February 1994.

Mr. Roger Evans: Asylum seekers who are liable for housing costs can claim housing benefit in the normal way. They are not, however, separately identified in the statistical information gathered by local authorities. Accordingly, it is not possible to estimate the housing benefit payable to asylum seekers.

War Pensions

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those service personnel who served in Northern Ireland are currently in receipt of a war pension.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of war widows currently in receipt of pensions qualified for payment after 14 August 1945; and how many have so qualified within the last 12 months.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Some 1,608 war widows pensions were awarded in the year ending 31 December 1994.

Child Support Agency

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will set out details of the compensation scheme available in the case of the Child Support Agency failing to take appropriate action;

(2) how many time compensation has been awarded by the Child Support Agency when they failed to take appropriate action.

Mr. Burt: The Child Support Agency may consider paying compensation under the terms of the Department of Social Security special payments arrangements. Since the CSA is a relatively new business, we are considering how those arrangements might better cover CSA cases. When these are agreed, we shall be making public the criteria under which payments for redress may be considered as we do for other agencies of the Department. In the meantime, officials will carefully consider the merits of any requests for compensation and what redress, if any, should be made.

To the end of January 1995, we have made special payments for financial redress on 34 occasions.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Resettlement Agency, *(b)* the Benefits Agency, *(c)* the Contributions Agency, *(d)* the Child Support Agency, *(e)* the Information Technology Services Agency and *(f)* his Department.

Mr. Hague: A number of steps are being taken across the Department to manage sickness absence. Specific initiatives include: the internal publication of absence details, awareness presentations for line managers and staff, guidance on the responsibilities of line managers, tightening up the procedures for first reporting absence, return to work interviews, involving personnel branches in appropriate cases and seeking examples of best practice from other organisations. There are also various health promotion initiatives.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 March.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Economic Policy

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what is the Government's policy in respect of promoting political, social and economic expansion;

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which his goals relating to the promotion of social and economic expansion have been achieved.

The Prime Minister: The objective of the Government's economic policy is to promote sustained economic growth in order to raise living standards and create jobs. The Government are pursuing prudent fiscal and monetary policies together with supply-side measures which will continue to improve the working of the economy. This is the only way to ensure that economic recovery is sustained with low inflation.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister who will represent Her Majesty's Government at the special meeting of the members of the Basel convention in Dakar called to clear up the confusion on how to define toxic waste; and what will be their remit.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Her Majesty's Government will send an observer.

TRANSPORT

Planning and Compensation Act 1991

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the full text of his Department's criteria and guidelines for implementing section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 *(a)* pertaining to when section 62 first came into effect and *(b)* pertaining currently.

Mr. Watts: I have placed in the Library the guidelines and application form, which were introduced on 17 January 1992, and also the current versions of these documents, which are under review.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and *(b)* the Driving Standards Agency.

Mr. Norris: For a number of years DVLA has been pursuing a strategy of improving attendance through the introduction of more effective line management controls and initiatives to improve staff health and motivation. Since 1985, the average number of days per employee lost through sickness in DVLA has reduced from 16 days to the civil service average of eight days.

Sick absence in the Driving Standards Agency is currently well above the civil service average. The agency is setting up a working group to identify the reasons for this and to make proposals. In the meantime, the agency has introduced a pay scheme designed to reward staff who, through good attendance, help the agency to provide a better service to its customers.

British Rail Property (Crime)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were victims of crime on British Rail property in each year since 1991.

Mr. Watts: The table shows by calendar year, the total number of offences recorded on British Rail property, including ScotRail, by the British Transport police, which is the force responsible for keeping law and order on the railway.

Date	*Number of offences*
1991	22,186
1992	20,904
1993	20,359
1994	17,313

Road Building Projects

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all priority 1, priority 2, agreed start and reserve start road building projects currently planned or under way, giving their cost and completion dates.

Mr. Watts: The bulk of this information is contained in "Trunk Roads in England 1994 Review", a copy of which is in the Library. The new starts programme for the remainder of 1994–95 and for 1995–96 was subsequently amended by my right hon. Friend's announcement of 19 December 1994. A copy of the press release issued at the time is also in the Library.

Completion dates for schemes which are not yet under construction depend on the successful conclusion of statutory procedures and the availability of funds.

Orange Badge Holders

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he will make to enable orange badge holders to park on double yellow lines for an indefinite amount of time when the yellow lines occupy space outside an orange badge holder's home.

Mr. Norris: I have no plans to extend the time limit for parking on yellow lines. Local authorities have powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to designate by order a parking place reserved for a disabled badge holder.

Trunk Roads Review

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the next trunk roads in England review will be produced.

Mr. Watts: There are no plans for a further review of the trunk road programme at present. The results of the last review of the programme are set out in "Trunk Roads in England 1994 Review".

Overloaded Lorries

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many convictions were secured in respect of the operation of overloaded lorries in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate.

I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. Paul Tyler, dated 9 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of convictions in respect of the operation of overloaded lorries in the last 10 years.

I do not have information for the past 10 years and it can only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, the details below show the number of successful prosecutions carried out by the Vehicle Inspectorate and the Local Authority Trading Standards Officers for the last 5 years.

Year	*Number of prosecutions*
1990–91	13,396
1991–92	13,295
1992–93	10,831
1993–94	9,151
1994–95[1]	8,555

[1]year to date.

If there is any further information you require, please let me know.

Marchioness

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide references for public and published statements made by him or his predecessors providing reasons for not establishing a formal investigation in to the loss of the Marchioness and lives as provided for in section 56 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1970.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* Reference to statements made by Transport Ministers are as follows:

Minister	*Date*	*Volume/Column*
1. Patrick McLoughlin	WPQ 19 January 1990	Vol. 165 Col. *443*
2. Patrick McLoughlin	WPQ 12 February 1990	Vol. 167 Col. *103–04*
3. Patrick McLoughlin	OPQ 12 March 1990	Vol. 169 Cols. *5–6*
4. Patrick McLoughlin	WPQ 29 March 1990	Vol. 170 Col. *240*
5. Steven Norris	Debate 9 July 1992	Vol. 211 Cols. *669–700*
6. Robert Key	Debate 14 December 1993	Vol. 234 Cols. *984–986* and *988*
7. Steven Norris	WPQ 15 December 1993	Vol. 234 Col. *706*
8. Steven Norris	WPQ 11 January 1994	Vol. 235 Col. *132*
9. Steven Norris	WPQ 16 December 1994	Vol. 251 Col. *876*

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on his Department preparation and supervision costs in "Trunk Roads in England 1994 Review" as regards the proposed Birmingham northern relief road;

(2) how much his Department expects to spend on the compulsory purchase of land and property to make way for the proposed Birmingham northern relief road;

(3) how much his Department has spent so far on the administration of the public inquiry into the proposed Birmingham northern relief road; and how much he expects to spend by the time the inquiry is finished.

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 1 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *597–98*.

Auxiliary Coastguards

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what official vehicles are available to Cemaes Bay auxiliary coastguard;

(2) on how many occasions in the past 12 months the auxiliary coastguards have been forced to use their own vehicles in response to emergency calls.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Coastguard agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Ms Joan Walley, dated 9 March 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary questions as these questions deal with operational matters, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

PQ 1082/94/95. The Coastal Response Team at Cemaes Bay have occasional use of coastal response vehicles.

PQ 1072/94/95. None. All Auxiliary Coastguards on enrolment agree that their private vehicles may be required for emergency purposes, should it be necessary.

M25 Link Roads

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make a further announcement on the progress of his plans for link roads between junctions 12 and 15 of the M25; and when he intends to hold a public inquiry into the scheme.

Mr. Watts: Draft orders for the further improvement of the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 were published in April 1994. The public inquiry into the scheme was delayed to allow objectors more time to prepare their cases. An announcement will be made in due course.

Road Surfacing Costs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost per kilometre of *(a)* porous asphalt; and *(b)* conventional asphalt; and what is the lifespan in each case.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 8 March 1995:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts MP, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the cost per kilometre of *(a)* porous asphalt and *(b)* conventional asphalt; and what is the life span in each case.

Costs of constructing roads with porous and conventional asphalt surfacings can very significantly between contracts and are influenced by geographical location, local construction details, complexity of traffic management and associated works such as drainage. There are also differences which reflect market conditions. The costs given in the following table are of surfacing materials only and are broadly indicative bearing in mind the limited use of porous asphalt. There are additional costs for porous asphalt which are not applicable to conventional asphalt. Additional drainage is needed and more frequent salting in cold weather. Further, laying the material is more difficult and requires more extensive traffic management. These additional costs are not included in the figures given and can vary widely depending on site conditions.

Approximate £ thousand/kilometre

	Porous asphalt	*Conventional asphalt*
Single carriageway	50–100	35–45
2 lane dual carriageway all purpose	100–200	70–100
motorway	120–220	80–110
3 lane dual carriageway all purpose	140–260	90–130
motorway	130–290	100–150
4 lane dual carriageway motorway	190–330	120–180

Porous asphalt surfaces are not suitable for use on all roads, but providing conditions are suitable, a life of over 7 years should be possible and in some cases as long as 12 years. This is in contrast to conventional asphalt surfaces where life can range from 10 to 15 years.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Probation Reform

15. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reform of probation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have already published proposals to reform the qualifying training of probation officers. I am today publishing revised national standards for community sentences; and will shortly be publishing a Green Paper setting out proposals for legislation to restructure community punishment. These initiatives are between them intended to ensure that the work of the probation service commands the greatest possible confidence on the part of the courts and the public.

Cost of Crime

16. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's latest estimate of the cost of crime to the British economy.

Mr. Maclean: It is not feasible to provide a meaningful total figure. Any realistic assessment would have to take full account of the personal and social damage as well as the financial costs.

Child Refugees

17. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied child refugees entered the United Kingdom in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and what information he has about the principal ports of entry.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A total of 357 unaccompanied children applied for asylum on arrival in 1994. Although specific information about principal ports of entry is not available, most of these applications would have been made at Heathrow.

Crime Prevention

18. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority he attaches to the partnership approach to crime prevention.

Mr. Maclean: Partnership is fundamental to the Government's approach to crime prevention. We all need to work together in partnership to ensure that the opportunities for crime are reduced. In September 1994, my right hon. and learned Friend launched the partnership campaign "Partners Against Crime", aimed at encouraging individual members of the public to join with the police as partners in the fight against crime.

Asylum Policy

19. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received since 15 February expressing support for his asylum policy.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I believe that there is widespread support for the Government's objective of determining asylum claims as quickly as possible, in the interests both of genuine refugees and of the removal of those whose claims are unfounded. The measures announced on 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *693-95*, will contribute significantly to that objective.

Police Liaison, London

20. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the interrelationship between himself, the Police Authority for London, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, the advisory committee and the police and community consultative groups in each of the London boroughs.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend is the police authority for the Metropolitan police district. The Metropolitan police committee will advise him in that capacity, taking into account information received from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and his senior colleagues, from the police community consultative groups operating within the Metropolitan police district, and from other sources.

Criminal Injury Compensation

21. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take about the future organisation and level of criminal injury compensation.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given earlier this afternoon to the same question from the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger).

Drugs

22. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many charges for possession of the drug crack have been brought in the Metropolitan police area; and what new initiatives he will take to deal with this threat.

Mr. Maclean: Information is not held in this form. Records are not kept of the numbers of charges for possession.

The latest available figures, supplied by the Metropolitan police, show that there were 542 recorded offences of possession of cocaine in the period October 1993 to September 1994. There are no separate records for crack. Seizures are, however, recorded separately: provisional figures show 847 crack seizures in the Metropolitan police area for 1994.

The Government's strategy for dealing with drugs misuse is currently being reviewed and a White Paper will be published in the spring. Vigorous law enforcement will continue and there will also be a new emphasis on drug education and prevention.

Fire Stations (Closure)

23. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of local fire stations programmed for closure following the reduction in fire authority budgets.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend has made no such estimate. Any fire authority wishing to reduce the operational capability of its brigade, including the number of fire stations, must seek his approval under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. His practice is to grant approval only where he is satisfied that the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover will be maintained.

Persistent Juvenile Offenders

24. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to help the police and courts to deal with the most persistent juvenile offenders.

Mr. Maclean: The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 contains important new measures which will help the police and the courts to deal more effectively with young people who commit crimes. The secure training order will enable the courts to order the detention of persistent juvenile offenders for periods of between three months and one year, followed by a similar period of supervision.

Make-a-difference Initiative

25. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the progress of the make-a-difference initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This initiative to promote voluntary activity has made excellent progress: grants have been made to 27 local partnerships; Government Departments have prepared action plans for involving volunteers; and last week we launched a national telephone helpline to make it easier for people to find volunteering opportunities in their area. The make-a-difference team, with members from business, voluntary and public sectors, is aiming to publish a strategy on the future of volunteering in June.

Road Scheme Protests

26. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional financial provision he plans to make for police forces in 1995 to cover the cost of protecting road schemes against protesters.

Mr. Maclean: The policing of demonstrations at road scheme sites falls within the normal law enforcement duties of the police. The costs are provided for in the same way as the costs of any other forms of policing. Police authorities will still be able to apply for special payments of grant where they face really large and exceptional demands which they could not have foreseen.

Police Funding

27. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what percentage police funding has risen since 1979 in real terms.

Mr. Maclean: Estimated expenditure on the police service in England and Wales has increased by 92 per cent. in real terms since 1978–79.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the UK Passport Agency, *(b)* the Prison Service and *(c)* the Home Office.

Mr. Howard: The Home Office has procedures in place to record and monitor absence through sickness. Steps have recently been taken to reinforce line managers' responsibilities in this area. Where levels of absence through sickness give cause for concern specialist medical advice may be sought. There is also an occupational health care programme for staff and access to the welfare service.

The UK Passport Agency has a policy on health care and absence caused by sickness which aims, where possible, to prevent absence through sickness and thereby to increase efficiency and promote the well-being of staff. This is achieved by monitoring of absence through sickness by line managers, ensuring that staff have access to counselling, an on-going health care programme, seminars/awareness training for line managers and the issuing of guidance/information to all staff.

The control of absence through sickness in the Prison Service is the responsibility of local managers, and following a report by an independent consultant, comprehensive guidance was issued to them in 1992. In addition, the service is seeking ways to enable quicker decisions to be taken on medical retirement, where that is appropriate; and various occupational health initiatives have been taken to encourage healthy practices, such as life style screening and health education seminars.

In all areas of the Home Office, absence through sickness may lead to retirement on medical grounds or action being taken under the inefficiency procedures.

Police (Complaints)

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1989 the number of complaints against the police completed in England and Wales in which racially discriminatory behaviour was alleged; how many of those were substantiated and how many were unsubstantiated; how many were informally resolved; of those that were substantiated, how many resulted in a disciplinary charge; and what was the outcome of such a charge.

Mr. Maclean: Figures for the number of complaints against the police of racially discriminatory behaviour and their outcome are set out.

Information is not collected centrally about the categories of offences leading to disciplinary proceedings.

Complaints of racially discriminatory behaviour (all police forces in England and Wales)

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Substantiated	4	5	7	3	5
Unsubstantiated[1]	107	210	240	259	281
Informally resolved	67	69	79	98	96
Withdrawn	113	125	100	101	68
Total	291	409	426	461	450

[1] Including complaints dealt with by dispensation.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* the Metropolitan police and *(b)* the rest of England and Wales the number of police complaints in each of the last five years for which records are available that were dispensed with (i) in total, (ii) because it was not reasonably practicable to complete a satisfactory investigation, (iii) because they were anonymous, (iv) because they were repetitious, (v) because they were vexatious, oppressive or otherwise an abuse of the procedures for dealing with complaints, (vi) because more than 12 months has elapsed between the

incident and the making of the complaints or (vii) because the matter had already been informally resolved; and if he will list in each case the number of requests for dispensations that were (1) made and (2) refused.

Mr. Maclean: The Police Complaints Authority has kept statistics in relation to individual reasons for dispensations since 1993 only.

In 1993, in respect of all forces in England and Wales, the figures were as follows:

Reason for dispensation	*Number*
Incapable of meaningful investigation	6,717
Anonymous	4
Repetitious	69
Vexatious, etc.	83
Delayed	202
Total	7,075

There were also nine dispensations refused in 1993.

The total numbers of dispensations recorded by the Police Complaints Authority since 1989 which were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused, in respect of all forces in England and Wales, are as follows:

Year	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Granted	2,113	2,991	4,083	6,035
Refused	28	42	37	20

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil claims for police misconduct were reported to HM inspectorate of constabulary in each of the last three years for which figures are available in respect of each police force in England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected by HM inspectorate of constabulary.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases in each of the last three years for which figures are available complaints against the police were investigated by an officer from another force.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of cases of complaints against the police for each of the last three years for which figures area available *(a)* which were mandatorily referred to the Police Complaints Authority for supervision, *(b)* which were referred to the authority for it to decide whether or not to supervise the investigation, *(c)* which the authority decided on their merits to supervise in the public interest and *(d)* which were referred to the authority for supervision in total.

Mr. Maclean: Sections 87 and 88 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Police (Complaints) (Mandatory Referrals etc) Regulations 1985 define the type of case which must be referred or may be referred voluntarily to the Police Complaints Authority for possible supervision. The Police Complaints Authority is required by section 89 of the 1984 Act to supervise the investigation of all complaints relating to a death or serious injury. It may also supervise any other complaint or non-complaint case which is voluntarily referred to it and where it considers it in the public interest to do so. The authority may also require the referral of a complaint so that it may consider supervision.

The table shows the number of cases, including those originating from a complaint, between 1991 and 1993 *(a)* which were mandatorily referred to the Police Complaints Authority for supervision; *(b)* which were voluntarily referred; *(c)* which were required to be referred by the Police Complaints Authority; *(d)* the total cases referred; *(e)* the number which were mandatorily supervised by the Police Complaints Authority; and *(f)* which were supervised at the authority's discretion.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
Mandatory referrals	4,212	4,333	3,998
Voluntary referrals	103	132	129
Referrals required by PCA	15	11	12
Total referrals	4,330	4,476	4,139
Mandatory supervision	421	420	625
Discretionary supervision	308	337	326

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many police complaints cases completed in each of the last five years for which figures are available complainants made formal representations of dissatisfaction with an investigation or its outcome.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Appeals

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1988 the number of cases referred by him to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)(a) of the Court of Appeal Act 1968 in respect of conviction; and for each such year what was *(a)* the number of defendants involved, *(b)* the number of appeals allowed and *(c)* the number of appeals dismissed.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is given in the following table:

References to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)(a) of he Criminal Appeal Act 1968 in respect of conviction—1988 to 1994

Year	*Cases (defendants)*	*Outcome of appeal*	
		Allowed	*Dismissed*
1988	[1]2 (2)	—	1 (1)
1989	3 (6)	3 (6)	Nil
1990	7 (20)	7 (20)	Nil
1991	10 (12)	[2]10 (12)	Nil
1992	8 (11)	5 (8)	3 (3)
1993	[3]8 (9)	4 (5)	2 (2)
1994	[4]9 (12)	1 (2)	Nil

[1] One case later abandoned.
[2] Court ordered a re-trial in one case: defendant later acquitted.
[3] Two cases outstanding.
[4] Eight cases outstanding.

Royal Prerogative of Mercy

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1989

the number of cases in which the royal prerogative of mercy was exercised to grant *(a)* a free pardon, *(b)* a remission of imprisonment, *(c)* remission of youth custody and detention in a young offender's institution, *(d)* remission of detention and *(e)* remission of fine on grounds affecting the original conviction, in cases other than those involving road traffic offences.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The numbers of free pardons is given in the following table:

Exercises of the royal prerogative of mercy to grant a free pardon on grounds affecting the original conviction (excluding cases involving convictions for road traffic offences) 1989 to 1994

Year	*Free pardons*
1989	15
1990	17
1991	14
1992	4
1993	5
1994	3

The royal prerogative of mercy has not been used in the other categories—which go to a person's sentence—on grounds affecting the original conviction.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1988 the number of cases in which the royal prerogative of mercy was exercised to grant *(a)* free pardons, including those relating to road traffic offences, *(b)* pardons granted on grounds affecting the original conviction, *(c)* pardons granted for other reasons and *(d)* pardons relating to traffic offences.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is given in the following table:

Exercises of the royal prerogative of mercy to grant pardons—1988 to 1994

Year	*(a)* *Free pardons (all cases)*	*(b)* *Pardons on grounds affecting original conviction*	*(c)* *Pardons for other reasons (ie excluding (b))*	*(d)* *Pardons relating to traffic offences*
1988	39	39	—	26
1989	50	50	—	35
1990	47	47	—	30
1991	37	37	—	23
1992	19	19	—	15
1993	22	22	1	17
1994	12	12	—	9

Miscarriages of Justice (Compensation)

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount paid in compensation to victims of miscarriages of justice for each year since 1989–90; what was the total amount paid pursuant to the Criminal Justice Act 1988 for each such year; what was the total amount paid under the discretionary scheme for each such year; and in each year in each category what was the number of such payments.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The total amount of compensation for miscarriages of justice paid since the financial year 1989–90 is £6,244,000, including £565,733 in ex gratia awards:

	£ million
1989–90	0.285
1990–91	0.839
1991–92	1.719
1992–93	0.532
1993–94	1.506
Part year ending 31 December 1994	1.363

These totals include interim payments in cases in which the final amount of the award has yet to be determined. The information is not collated in a way which enables separate totals for ex gratia payments to be distinguished.

Agreement in principle to pay compensation was given, per calendar year, to the following numbers of individuals:

1989: 6(1)
1990: 10(8)
1991: 27(2)
1992: 26(1)
1993: 9(2)
1994: 19

Figures in brackets show the number of ex gratia awards included in the totals.

Extradition

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what request he has received from Singapore requesting the extradition of *(a)* Mr. Anthony Hawes, *(b)* Mr. Andrew Frazer, *(c)* Mr. Simon Jones, *(d)* Mr. Ian Douglas, *(e)* Mr. Gordon Bowser, *(f)* Mr. Peter Baring, *(g)* Mr. Andrew Tuckey, *(h)* Mr. Ron Baker and *(i)* Mr. Peter Norris; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No such request has been received.

Firearms

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has concerning the number of non-functioning deactivated firearms which are currently held in the United Kingdom; what licences are required for such firearms; on how many occasions in each of the last five years for which figures are available such firearms have been used in the course of the perpetration of crimes; what sentences are provided by law for the use of such firearms; what plans he has to review the law in this area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Firearms deactivated in accordance with the provisions set out in section 8 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 fall outside the scope of firearms controls and do not therefore require a firearms certificate. Figures are not available about the number of deactivated firearms of the occasions on which such weapons have been used. The use of a firearm or imitation firearm in the furtherance of crime carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

In the light of concerns that some deactivated firearms have been illegally restored to working order and subsequently used in crime, the standards to which guns are deactivated have been reviewed and more stringent specifications will be introduced shortly.

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the existing law preventing the sale to the public or easy access by the public to non-lethal weapons, with particular reference to Air Taser and other stun guns.

Mr. Maclean: Air Taser and other stun guns are classed as prohibited weapons under section 5(1)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968, as amended. Their possession, acquisition, manufacture, sale or transfer is prohibited without the authority of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State does not grant authority to individual members of the public to possess such weapons. Possession of a prohibited weapon without authority is an offence for which the maximum penalty is 10 years, imprisonment or an unlimited fine or both. I am satisfied that the existing law in this area is adequate.

Interception of Communications

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about GCHQ staff at Menwith Hill station intercepting domestic and international telephone calls.

Mr. Howard: None.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many warrants he has issued in each year since 1992, to date, under the Interception of Communications Act 1985; what duration of interception each warrant specified; and how many warrants are in force at present.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the annexes to the reports of the Interception of Communications Commissioner for 1992 and 1993, Cm 2173 and Cm 2522, copies of which are in the Library. Under section 4 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985, a warrant is issued for a period of two months. It may lapse at the end of that period or it may be cancelled before the two months have elapsed or it may be renewed for a further period. It is not the Government's practice to publish figures for warrants in force at particular times other than in the commissioner's reports.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people seeking asylum in Britain have applied for *(a)* a writ of habeas corpus and *(b)* a judicial review of their case while in detention in the last 12 months.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: During the 12 months to 31 January 1995, 221 asylum applicants sought judicial review of their cases. No statistics of asylum applicants seeking a writ of habeas corpus are maintained. Separate statistics are also not maintained of the numbers of asylum applicants seeking judicial review of their cases while in detention.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people seeking asylum in 1993–94 absconded.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The records do not distinguish between asylum seekers and others who absconded from detention in 1993 and 1994 and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of asylum seekers who failed to comply with the terms on which they were granted temporary admission in 1993 is not available. However, a special exercise relating to 1994 identified 677 people, who had claimed asylum at some stage, as having failed to comply with their terms of temporary admission.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* Sri Lankan and *(b)* Turkish nationals applied for asylum status in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many asylum seekers were deported in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many *(a)* Sri Lankan and *(b)* Turkish asylum seekers were deported in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement;

(4) how many people applied for asylum status in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: In 1994, a total of 32,830 applications for asylum were received in the United Kingdom. Of these, 2,350 were from Sri Lankan nationals and 2,045 from Turkish nationals.

The available figures for departures relating to those refused asylum or exceptional leave to remain in the country are for those removed or who embarked voluntarily after deportation or illegal entry action had commenced against them. Out of an estimated total of 2,110 departures in 1994, 130 were Turkish nationals and 45 were Sri Lankan nationals.

Information on applications for asylum for 1993 and earlier years is published in table 2.2 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1993", issue 17/94. Information on removals and voluntary departures is published in table 9.1 of the same publication. Information on removals prior to 1992 is not available. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been accepted for asylum in the United Kingdom in the past 12 months;

(2) how many people applying for asylum in the United Kingdom in 1994–95 were given exceptional leave to remain;

(3) how many people *(a)* have sought and *(b)* were granted asylum in the United kingdom in 1994–95.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: During 1994, 32,830 applications for asylum, excluding dependants, were received in the United Kingdom. Some 20,990 decisions on asylum applications were taken during the year, of which 825 cases were granted asylum and 3,660 were refused asylum but granted exceptional leave to remain.

The latest month for which data are available is January 1995. During this period, 3,570 applications for asylum were received and 2,450 applications were decided. Of these decisions, 130 cases were granted asylum and 460 cases were refused asylum but granted exceptional leave to remain.

Settlement Visas

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many wives have applied from *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan for settlement visas to join their husbands in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years; and how many have been (i) granted and (ii) refused;

(2) how many husbands have applied from *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan for settlement visas to join their wives in each of the last three years; and how many have been (i) granted and (ii) refused.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information is given in the table.

Applications for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom made by spouses in India and Pakistan, 1992–1994

Number of persons

	Wives			*Husbands*		
	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
India						
Applications received[1]	1,840	1,930	1,960	620	620	580
Granted[2,3]	1,860	1,660	1,710	570	480	450
Initial refusals	290	310	410	300	280	340
Pakistan						
Applications received[1]	2,940	3,020	3,210	3,090	2,640	2,720
Granted[2,3]	2,670	2,390	2,290	2,370	1,990	1,720
Initial refusals	440	620	710	1,550	1,900	1,690

[1] Including applications subsequently withdrawn or lapsed.
[2] Granted initially or on appeal.
[3] Applications granted may include applications received in the previous year.

Law Enforcement Officers

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if members of the Renseignements Généraux are authorised or need authorisation to work in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Law enforcement officers representing foreign Goverments working in the United Kingdom must observe guidance issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. A copy of the guidance, known as the "Whitehall Guidelines", has been placed in the Library.

Prisons (Drugs)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug and related finds by type of drug were made in women's gaols in England and Wales in each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 9 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many drug and related finds by type of drug were made in women's jails in England and Wales in each year since 1990.

Information drug finds was not recorded centrally until 25 September 1990.

The table below lists the drug and related finds in women's jails for the calendar years 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Items	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Heroin	5	4	10	36
Cocaine	4	6	4	6
LSD	0	0	5	2
Amphetamines	1	0	3	2
Barbiturates	0	0	4	3
Cannabis	32	27	44	58
Cannabis Plant	4	1	4	11
Crack	0	0	0	0
Other	3	9	10	23
Authentic syringe	3	10	23	21
Improvised syringe	0	0	0	0
Authentic needle	0	0	2	3
Improvised needle	0	0	0	0
Pipe	1	0	1	0
Roach	0	0	2	2
Total	53	57	112	167

It should be noted that increases in the numbers of finds may reflect more effective searching, as a result of the priority being given to the control of drugs, and are not necessarily an indication that there has been a corresponding increase in the presence of drugs.

North East London Probation Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the effect of the November 1993 budget statement on the budget of the North East London robation service;

(2) what will be the impact of the November 1994 budget statement on the North East London probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *30*.

Non-governmental Agencies

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what non-governmental agencies are funded by the Government to work in crime prevention; and what initiatives they are undertaking.

Mr. Maclean: The Government provide a contribution to the core costs of Crime Concern, whose main objectives are to establish local crime reduction schemes and to develop new approaches to crime prevention. The

Government have also contracted Crime Concern, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and the Society of Voluntary Associates to manage safer cities projects in 30 towns in England and Wales. The projects in turn provide grants for local crime prevention schemes. In addition, we have made extra funds available in 1994–95 for local partnerships which wish to install closed circuit television schemes in their areas as a crime prevention measure.

Prisons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the staffing ratio of *(a)* privately managed prisons and *(b)* publicly operated prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 9 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the staffing ratio in both privately managed prisons and publicly operated prisons.

On 31 January 1995, the staff:inmate ratio for privately managed prisons was 1:2.43. The staff figure is based on the number of prisoner custody officers employed, which equate to the three officer grades in publicly operated prisons. The inmate figure is the number held in these prisons at the end of January.

On 31 January 1995 the staff:inmate ratio for publicly managed prisons was 1:2.0. The staff figure is based on the officer, senior officer and principal officer grades and includes specialist staff. The inmate figure is the total inmate population as at 31 January 1995, excluding those held in police cells and privately managed prisons.

The ratio for publicly managed prisons is affected by the inclusion of dispersal prisons and other prisons with specialist functions which have a relatively high staff:inmate ratio, as well as accommodation being out of use for refurbishment. The private sector does not include prisons in this category, and is not currently undergoing refurbishment.

Football Pools and Lotteries

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to guarantee the continued viability of the football pools and society and local lotteries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The Government have made a number of changes to the law to remove unnecessary restrictions on football pools and lotteries and more changes are on the way.

A number of measures benefiting football pools were introduced in November 1994, when part IV of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 came into force. The age limit for participation was reduced from 18 to 16; the use of premises for the collection of coupons and stakes were permitted; and roll-over of prize money was permitted in certain circumstances.

More recently, the Government have invited the broadcasting authorities to revise their advertising codes so as to permit broadcast advertising of the pools. In addition, we will shortly be issuing a consultation paper on gaming machines and betting offices which will include a proposal to allow betting offices to pay winnings on football pools coupons and to handle "spot the ball" coupons. Depending on the outcome of the consultation, the changes will be put into law later this year by an order made under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

I am currently considering what scope there is for further deregulatory measures.

Ashford (Middlesex) Remand Centre

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the site of the former Ashford (Middlesex) remand centre.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. David Wilshire, dated 9 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the future of the site of the former Ashford (Middlesex) Remand Centre.

No decisions have yet been taken regarding the future of this site. The Prison Service's estate strategy recognises a need for additional accommodation by the end of the century and sites are still being sought for some of the new prisons announced by the Home Secretary in 1993. Current assessments of future needs indicate that Ashford is not an ideal location for meeting future population pressures. Other sites are being sought but Ashford may be considered if more suitable locations are not available.

WALES

Public Appointments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the dates on which he intends to publish advertisements inviting applications to fill the vacancies on *(a)* the Arts Council of Wales, *(b)* the Sports Council of Wales, *(c)* the Wales tourist board, *(d)* the Wales Youth Agency, *(e)* the Welsh Development Agency, *(f)* the Glan Hafren NHS trust, *(g)* the Powys Health Care NHS trust, *(h)* the Morriston Hospital NHS trust and (i) Swansea NHS trust.

Mr. Redwood: I am keen to keep the boards of non-departmental public bodies and health bodies at the minimum number which is consistent with efficient management. Where there are vacancies to be filled, candidates are drawn from a variety of sources. These sources include the Welsh Office register of candidates for public appointment and, in some cases, specific advertisements. Recent health trust chairmanships were advertised.

Lead Piping

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to encourage the replacement of lead piping in drinking water supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Water companies must comply with the requirements relating to lead set in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989—SI 1989 No. 1147. Among other relevant provisions, the regulations require water companies to replace their part of a lead service pipe when requested to do so in writing by a consumer intending to remove his or her part of the pipe.

The Government fund the mandatory home renovation grant system available from local authorities and which may be used for lead pipe replacement. Mandatory home renovation grants are available to bring properties up to the statutory fitness standard, which includes the provision of an adequate piped supply of wholesome water: it is for local authorities to determine applications and decide whether an individual property meets this standard. Minor works assistance, which is always discretionary, may be available to those home owners in receipt of an income-related benefit, for small but essential repairs to their houses. Dwr Cymru Welsh Water has a grant scheme to help any of its customers wishing to replace lead plumbing and, when this is done, also undertakes to replace its communication pipe.

Cadw

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes in the priorities and approach of Cadw will be made following the appointment of a new chief executive.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend's priorities for Cadw will be set out in the Cadw corporate plan.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the allocation of European regional development fund to each of the objective 2 and 5(b) regions in Wales for the current programming period.

Mr. Redwood: The ERDF allocations for the industrial south Wales and rural Wales programme areas are £111.2 million over 1994 to 1996 and £89.9 million over 1994 to 1999 respectively.

Public Transport

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what initiatives his Department is pursuing to increase the use of public transport in Wales, and if he will make a statement;

(2) what new initiatives his Department is pursuing to improve public transport in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision of good quality public transport services is a matter for the transport industries. County councils have a duty to supplement services where they identify a need. The Welsh Office assists by means of the bus priority scheme. Privatisation of the railways will provide more opportunities for improvements in that sector.

Through Ticketing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with colleagues in the Department of Transport to discuss future ticketing arrangements for rail services in Wales and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Rail Regulator and Ministers are committed to continuing easy access to through ticketing for passengers. The regulator has recently consulted widely on this subject and is considering the representations he has received.

Railways

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to improve rail communications in Wales, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The development of rail communications is a matter for the railway industry. The Government's plan to transfer the railways to the private sector provides the best opportunities for improving rail services in Wales.

Rail Freight

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives his Department is pursuing to increase the use of railways in Wales for the transportation of freight; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Publicity will soon be given in Wales to the availability of enhanced grants to attract more freight on to the railways. The Welsh Development Agency has also been asked to consider the provision of rail freight connections at industrial estates in Wales.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* Cadw and *(b)* the Welsh Office.

Mr. Redwood: In addition to programmes to promote good health, Cadw and the Welsh Office have well-established procedures applying to all staff and their managers, for reporting and monitoring sickness absence, so that potential problems can be identified and addressed at an early stage. In appropriate cases, the advice of the civil service occupational health service is sought.

Cable Franchises

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what parts of north Wales he expects cabling to take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Independent Television Commission has responsibility under the Broadcasting Act 1990 for administering the local delivery franchising process. The ITC is considering franchises in Wales in response to expressions of interest already received, but would welcome further approaches from companies interested in providing services in any currently unfranchised areas in Wales.

Vehicle Spot Checks

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what location in Wales, he proposed to make roadside spot checks concerning atmospheric pollution caused by motor vehicles and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Staff from the Department of Transport's Vehicle Inspectorate will be carrying out roadside spot checks of vehicle emissions at various cities and towns nationwide, including Wales, over the coming weeks. There will be no advance warning of specific locations.

Optical Fibres

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next proposes to visit the optical fibres production centre on Deeside industrial park.

Mr. Redwood: I visited Optical Fibres Ltd. on the Deeside industrial park last October. I have no plans to do so again in the near future.

Optical Fibres is a world leader in the manufacture of fibre optic cables and is an excellent example of a Wales-based company at the forefront of the multimedia revolution.

Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to reduce unemployment in Clwyd; and what *(a)* job creation schemes and *(b)* training schemes he (i) has initiated in the last five years and (ii) will initiate.

Mr. Redwood: Unemployment in Clwyd, as elsewhere in Wales, is falling as the recovery proceeds. In the past five years, the strategic development scheme has been initiated by the Welsh Office while the Welsh Development Agency has participated in a number of regeneration schemes with the local authorities in the area. For 1994–95 and 1995–96, nearly £11 million has been allocated under the strategic development scheme to projects to promote economic development and job creation in Clwyd. The WDA's contribution to the urban and rural regeneration initiatives in which it is involved will amount to around £4 million in 1994–95.

Over the past five years, the North East Wales training and enterprise council has provide a wide range of services to help unemployed people back to work.

Significant measures introduced in the last five years include modern engineering apprenticeships and youth credits.

In 1995–96, modern apprenticeships will be supported in other occupational sectors and a new programme of accelerated modern apprenticeships will be aimed primarily at 18 and 19-year-old college leavers.

Regional selective assistance continues to make a significant contribution to creating and safeguarding jobs in Clwyd. Over the past five years, over 150 offers have been accepted which are forecast to create or safeguard almost 11,000 jobs.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to tackle long-term unemployment in Alyn and Deeside.

Mr. Redwood: Long-term unemployment, like unemployment generally, is falling as the recovery proceeds. A number of specific measures are in place to assist people who have been unemployed for more than a year to get back to work. These include training for work and restart.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to get people aged 25 years and under into work and out of long-term unemployment.

Mr. Redwood: A wide range of support is available to unemployed people under the age of 25. This includes training and practical help in finding work. All 16 and 17-year-olds who are not in full-time education or employment are guaranteed the offer of a suitable youth training place. Recent surveys have shown that 71 per cent. of young people who completed their training go into jobs or further education and training. Training opportunities for young people are being extended through modern apprenticeships and accelerated apprenticeships. Priority for recruitment under the training for work programme is now given to young people under the age of 25 who have never worked. Finally, the Employment Service offers a range of opportunities to help unemployed people into work including client advice, community action, job interview guarantee, jobclubs and work trials.

Drugaid

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had concerning the grant aiding of the 24-hour helpline for drug addiction problems run by Drugaid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: In October 1994, Drugaid was informed of the Government's proposal to establish a national HIV/AIDS and drugs telephone advice and information helpline from 1 April 1995, covering England, Scotland and Wales. Drugaid was invited to tender for the contract, and did so as part of a consortium. The contract was awarded to Network Scotland.

From 1 April, Network Scotland will provide an integrated 24-hour freephone English and Welsh language HIV/AIDS and drug helpline, which will refer users of the service to the appropriate local agencies.

It would be inappropriate for my Department to continue to support a Welsh helpline which would duplicate work undertaken nationally.

HEALTH

Nursing Homes

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people in registered nursing homes have paid the full cost of their care in each year since 1990.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Private Psychiatric Hospitals

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding the standards of care at private psychiatric hospitals.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding the standards of care in private psychiatric hospitals; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Arrangements for monitoring the standards of care given to national health service patients in private psychiatric hospitals are agreed between health authorities and NHS trusts and the private hospitals as part of the contracting process. Private psychiatric hospitals are subject to registration and inspection by the local health authority under the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received *(a)* about and *(b)* calling for the banning of the use of electro-convulsive therapy on children under the age of 16 years.

Mr. Bowis: We have received some such representations. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has advised us that it has updated its guidance on the use of electro-convulsive therapy. This guidance includes a series of recommendations on the use of electro-convulsive therapy in the treatment of young people.

Pensioners' Nursing Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pensioners have had to sell their homes to pay for their nursing care in the latest available year; and what percentage of them could have remained in day or respite care.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *642*.

Cycling

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue a consultation document on the work of the physical activity task force; and if the consultation process will reflect her recent statements on the health benefits of cycling by targeting cycling as a widely accessible form of exercise.

Mr. Sackville: No decisions have yet been taken on whether to issue a consultation document based on the work of "The Health of the Nation" physical activity task force, but I shall continue to endorse the health benefits of cycling.

Minimal Access Surgery

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding the adequacy of training for doctors using minimal access surgery.

Mr. Sackville: We have received a number of letters concerning training issues associated with minimal access surgery. The Department of Health and the Wolfson Foundation have provided funds to establish two national training centres in London and Leeds. The two centres offer a range of training courses in addition to those already well established in the national health service.

Epilepsy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS medicines prescribed for people with epilepsy was licensed *(a)* within the last five years, *(b)* more than five years ago, *(c)* more than 10 years and *(d)* more than 15 years ago.

Mr. Sackville: Records from the Medicines Control Agency do not relate specifically to national health service medicines. However, records show that there are currently 215 products licensed for prescription to people with epilepsy.

Then number of products licensed for epilepsy in the periods are:

(a) within the last five years—1991 to 1995: 96
(b) more than five years ago—1985 to 1990: 90
(c) more than 10 years ago—1979 to 1984: 41
(d) more than 15 years ago—1973 to 1978: 36

It is not possible to match this information on licensing with NHS prescriptions.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS medicine prescribed for people with epilepsy is prescribed by its generic name.

Mr. Malone: The percentage of drugs dispensed in the family health services authorities in England in 1993 and prescribed by generic name for the British national formulary section "Antiepileptics", chapter 4.8, was 45.8 per cent.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to the NHS of providing medicines to people with epilepsy in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Net ingredient cost of the British National Formulary therapeutic group Antiepileptics (Chapter 4.8), 1989–1993
England

£ million

Antiepileptics	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Net ingredient cost	19.0	21.6	26.0	31.0	36.3

1. The net ingredient cost refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.
2. The data for 1989 and 1990 are not consistent with data from 1991 onwards. Figures for 1989 and 1990 are based on a sample of 1 in 200 prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only. Figures from 1991 cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.

Wirral Hospital Trust

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with the Wirral hospital trust regarding the proposal to introduce generic worker grades, nurse restructuring and ward manager posts; if she approves of such changes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: National health service trusts are responsible for managing their own affairs, using the resources available to them to provide high-quality cost effective health services. Their freedom to determine the pay and conditions of their own staff is an important part of making services more responsive to local needs.

Market Testing

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what bids have been received from members of staff of *(a)* the North Yorkshire regional health authority, *(b)* the Northern regional health authority and *(c)* the Yorkshire regional health authority for a buy-out of specific services being market tested; and with what result.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contract John Greetham, chairman of the authority, for further details.

Barnet Health Authority

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her oral statement of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 40, regarding further investment in primary care initiatives of £85 million in London, if she will list the amount Barnet health authority will receive, the initiatives that will be funded in Barnet and whether any of these funds will be deployed in the area covered by the Edgware general hospital.

Mr. Malone: The additional £85 million for primary care initiatives in 1995–96 is targeted at health districts in the London initiative zone. Barnet is not included in the London initiative zone.

Filoviruses

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been carried out into human health risks associated with Ebola and Marburg viruses.

Mr. Sackville: Some limited studies of transmission and seroprevalence have been undertaken where cases have occurred in Africa. Responses to infection with Ebola, Marburg and other filoviruses have been studied in primates and cross protection studies using other filoviruses in animal models have also been undertaken. Improved diagnostic tests are currently under development.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what contingency plans are available in the event of an outbreak of Ebola or Marburg viruses in the United Kingdom;

(2) what facilities are available to quarantine persons potentially infected with Ebola and Marburg viruses.

Mr. Sackville: There are no special contingency plans to deal with an outbreak of Ebola or Marburg viruses. These viruses have shown very limited potential for spread outside endemic areas. There are powers available to local authorities in the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 over people, premises and property to control the spread of communicable disease. We do continue to take a cautious approach and recommend strict precautions for personnel dealing with definite or suspected cases of viral haemorrhagic fever to prevent any possibility of spread. The Department of Health funds high security infectious disease units for the treatment of patients with viral haemorrhagic fever, although no case has been seen in the United Kingdom for about 10 years. These viruses appear to have a limited capacity for spread within the human population and the need for a vaccine for use in the UK has not been established.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place with German and American health agencies relating to outbreaks of filovirus infection in these countries.

Mr. Sackville: There have been no recent discussions with any overseas Governments on filovirus infections. The outbreak in Germany occurred in 1967 and the outbreak in the United States of America occurred in 1989.

Local Authority Homes

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential places for the elderly were available in local authority homes in England in each year since 1990.

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table.

Number of places in local authority homes primarily for elderly people, England

As at 31 March	*Number of residential places*
1990	103,600
1991	96,100
1992	85,000
1993	75,400
1994	67,200

The decrease in number of local authority homes in part reflects the transfer by local authorities of the management and ownership of local authority homes to the independent sector.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has approved the conclusions of the study commissioned by the London ambulance service from Messrs. ORH, health consultants, concerning the resources received by that service in order to reach or maintain the patients charter standards and for ambulance response times.

Mr. Sackville: The report commissioned from ORH health consultants is a matter for the London ambulance service and the South Thames regional health authority.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to paragraph 7.2 of the evidence presented by her Department to the Health Committee on 2 March, in respect of the London ambulance service, what operational advantage she expects to arrive from transfers of the funding of that service from the regional health authority to district health authorities in their areas; and if she will give the number of districts so concerned.

Mr. Sackville: The delegation of funding for contracts for accident and emergency services with the London ambulance service from regional to district health authority level will ensure that the authorities concerned are fully involved in the process of specifying, negotiating and agreeing contracts with the London ambulance service and monitoring performance against those contracts. The 16 authorities will be represented for contracting purposes by a consortium of four lead purchasers. The consequent reduction in regional administrative costs will help to release funds for investment in direct patient care.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action was taken in her Department *(a)* by Ministers, *(b)* by the ambulance adviser to the Department of Health and *(c)* by the ambulance policy adviser group subsequent to the receipt of the petition of the House presented on 7 December 1990 concerning the continuing problems of the London ambulance service.

Mr. Sackville: At the time the South West Thames regional health authority was responsible for running the London ambulance service. The South Thames regional health authority is now responsible for the LAS and it, not my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her Department, has day-to-day responsibility for the management of the LAS.

We have provided a real terms increase of funding for the LAS each year. In addition, this year we have provided an extra £14.8 million to enable it to purchase an extra 180 ambulances and recruit 240 extra front-line staff. The Wells report identified a number of short, medium and long-term objectives for the LAS which it needs to achieve in order to provide the service our capital city needs.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will obtain and publish the periods and relevant dates when the activation time for emergency ambulances dispatched from the headquarters of the London ambulance service exceeded *(a)* 10, *(b)* 15, *(c)* 20, *(d)* 30 minutes and *(e)* each further multiple of 10 minutes.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on 25 January *Official Report*, columns *251–52*.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the system of computer-aided dispatch placed in service by the London ambulance service on 26 October 1992 was appraised or approved by her ambulance policy advisory group or ambulance adviser.

Mr. Sackville: No. It is not for the Department's ambulance policy advisory group or ambulance adviser to intervene in individual ambulance services' operational decision-making processes.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action was taken by her Department during 1991–92 consequent on the gradual deterioration in service of the London ambulance service quoted in her evidence on the Health Committee on 2 March.

Mr. Sackville: During 1991–92 the Department monitored the performance of the London ambulance service through reports from, and meetings with, the then South West Thames regional health authority, which was responsible for the direct management of the LAS.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what ministerial statements concerning the London ambulance service have been made since 1990 which have drawn on information or advice received from *(a)* her ambulance adviser and *(b)* the ambulance policy advisory group.

Mr. Sackville: All ministerial statements concerning ambulance services draw directly or indirectly on advice received from the ambulance adviser or the ambulance policy advisory group.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates she has made of the number of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease aged *(a)* 65 years and over or *(b)* under 65 years in (i) England and (ii) Wales; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1148*.

Ambulance Services Departmental Adviser

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will name the person holding the post of departmental adviser on ambulance services as the member of her ambulance policy group mentioned in the written evidence presented to the Health Committee on 2 March who have served in these capacities since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: The post of ambulance adviser to the Department of Health has been filled as follows:

1984–1991: Mr. Peter Hunt

1991–1994: Mr. Michael Willis

1994–: Mr. Gron Roberts

The ambulance policy advisory group met for the first time in January 1992.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given to certain directors of social services regarding the implications of local government reorganisation for personal social services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: None.

The social services inspectorate has been or will be in contact with specific authorities once the individual structural orders have been made. The SSI will be able to offer appropriate advice to those authorities on the implications of local government changes for personal social services. We expect to issue general guidance to all authorities later this year.

NHS trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-executive directors of NHS trusts have been paid in excess of £3,000 for two attendances.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has concerning the numbers of *(a)* deaths, *(b)* serious medical complications arising following (i) legal abortions and (ii) illegal abortions performed upon women from (1) England and Wales, (2) Scotland and (3) Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested for legal abortions is given in the tables. Data for 1993 are not yet available for Great Britain. Information for illegal abortions is not available.

Table 1: Number of deaths following legal abortions performed in Great Britain to residents of United Kingdom from 1984 to 1992

	Country of residence		
	England and Wales	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*
1984	2	0	0
1985	1	0	0
1986	0	0	0
1987	1	0	0
1988	1	0	0
1989	1	0	0
1990	1	0	0
1991	0	0	0
1992	1	0	0

Table 2: Number of complications[1] following legal abortions performed in Great Britain[2] to residents of United Kingdom 1984–1992

	Country of residence		
	England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
1984	893	96	1
1985	875	117	0
1986	796	108	0
1987	897	98	2
1988	735	111	2
1989	621	82	0
1990	658	103	2
1991	641	78	2
1992	695	63	3

[1] These figures represent the number of complications mentioned rather than the number of operations. It is not possible to distinguish the seriousness of the complications.

[2] Information on abortions performed in Scotland is based on hospital in-patient discharges. Data are given only for residents of Scotland as it is not possible to separate the remaining data by individual country of residence.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bananas

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is his assessment of the proportion of the cost benefit of the EU banana policy which accrues to banana producers; and if he will identify where the rest of the benefit goes;

(2) what estimate he has made of the additional costs of banana purchases to United Kingdom consumers in consequence of the EU banana policy; and what estimate he has made of the impact on the consumer prices in other EC nations;

(3) when he received the World bank report on the operation of the EU banana policy; and if he will make a statement outlining his views of its conclusions and also the power available to the United Kingdom Government to take any initiative on efficiency of use Community funds and the prices charged to the general public.

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 26 January 1995, c. 361.]:* I am now able to provide the following assessment of the recent report published under World bank auspices under the title "EU Bananarama III". This is the work of an economist now based in Australia who formerly worked for the World bank. It does not necessarily reflect the bank's views.

The findings in the report are based on economic modelling, not on an analysis of market data since the EU regime was introduced. The assumptions underlying the model clearly have a marked influence on the results found. In our view, they do not fully reflect economic and political realities, in particular the obligations which the EU has undertaken under the Lomé convention on maintaining access for African, Caribbean and Pacific bananas to the EU market.

The consumer cost of the regime is obviously partly offset by the taxpayer benefit in the form of revenues from the customs tariff. The remainder of the benefits of the EU regime go to traders holding licences to import dollar bananas and, now the framework agreement with Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Venezuela is in force, to producers in those countries.

Although the assumptions on which the calculations are based are not entirely clear, I am satisfied that the estimated consumer costs of the regime are overstated while the benefits to the ACP are understated, especially in the short term. As to consumer costs, the calculation appears to be based on a comparison with consumer costs in markets closer to the main sources of supply where retailing costs are lower. In addition, the estimate of ACP producer benefits assumes that, in the absence of the trading advantages offered by the EU regime, ACP countries would either continue to export the same volume of bananas as before, albeit at lower prices, or would benefit from their resources being switched out of banana production into more productive uses. In the case of the Windward Islands, whose economies are particularly dependent on bananas, viable alternative export crops offering comparable export opportunities and employment potential have not so far been identified, despite the effort which has gone into agricultural diversification in recent years. Were access for bananas to the EU market to be cut back, there would be immediate social and economic dislocation in the Caribbean and increased social costs.

Since the EU banana regime came into force in July 1993, retail prices in the United Kingdom have fallen. Indeed, in 1994, they were at their lowest level for nearly a decade. French consumers also now pay less for their bananas. In Germany, the only other major member state market on which we have full price information, consumers pay significantly more. This results in part from the application of the common customs tariff. Prior to July 1993, Germany benefited from a special derogation from EU rules enabling it to import bananas free of all duties. This could clearly not be continued once the single market regime was in place.

The economic prescription put forward in "Bananarama III" of free trade in bananas imported into the EU with aid for disadvantaged ACP producers would result in savings for EU consumers, particularly in the short term, but extra costs to the EU taxpayer.

While recognising the need for ACP producers to continue to improve their competitiveness through restructuring and some diversification, the Government remain confident that the EU bananas regime successfully reconciles the requirements of the single market and the need for adequate supplies of good-quality bananas to our consumers with our long-standing commitments to the ACP producers to promote access to the EU market.

Bovine Offals

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what dates the new rules for requiring separate vehicles for the carrying of specified bovine offals were debated by Parliament and introduced by his Department.

Mrs. Browning: A statutory instrument will be laid shortly introducing a requirement for a specific dye to be used to identify specified bovine offals. The Government are still considering other proposals concerning the collection and disposal of specified bovine offals.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the results of the consultation on his proposals on nitrate vulnerable zones.

Mr. Jack: There have been over 500 responses to the consultation document on the designation of nitrate vulnerable zones in England and Wales. These have raised many issues requiring detailed technical assessment. The Government hope to be able to publish their response to the consultation, including the proposed amendments to boundaries, in about a month's time.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* The previous permanent secretary retired in February 1993. He has subsequently been appointed chairman of the Residuary Milk Marketing Board.

Food Balance of Trade

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the balance of trade in food in each year since 1985.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Imports and exports of food, feed and drink as recorded in the overseas trade statistics in each year since 1985 are shown in the table below. There has been a much bigger increase in exports than in imports since 1985. This has served to limit the increase in the difference between them—the crude trade gap—which has fallen by 22 per cent. in real terms.

£ million

Year	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*Percentage change 1985–1993*
Imports	9,482	10,070	10,276	10,602	11,420	12,298	12,262	13,406	14,105	+49
Exports	4,430	5,038	5,166	4,909	5,886	6,352	6,827	7,521	8,215	+85
Crude trade gap[1]	5,052	5,031	5,110	5,693	5,534	5,936	5,435	5,886	5,890	+17

Note:
[1] Because of differences in valuation principles, the crude trade gap overstates the contribution of food, feed and drink to the deficit on visible trade in the balance of payment statistics by about 15 per cent.

Chicken Feed

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether chickens may be fed *(a)* meat, *(b)* kitchen scraps or *(c)* worms.

Mrs. Browning: Chickens may be fed meat or kitchen scraps provided they are processed in accordance with the requirements of the Diseases of Animals (Waste Food) Order 1973, as amended. There are no restrictions on the feeding of worms to chickens.

Salmonella in Poultry (Danish Controls)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports have been provided by the British embassy in Copenhagen on the Danish regime for monitoring and controlling salmonella in poultry, so as to enable him to make comparisons with the United Kingdom's regime.

Mrs. Browning: The embassy in Copenhagen has provided the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with details of the measures taken by Denmark to monitor and control salmonella in poultry. The UK has also been supplied with information on Danish controls in the EU Standing Veterinary Committee.

Sheep Quota

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received, by each region, for sheep quota from category 3(c) of the 1993 national reserve; and how many were assessed as eligible for each region.

Mr. Jack: The table sets out the information requested for each of the Ministry's administrative regions:

	Category (c) applications received	*Assessed as eligible*
Anglia	142	0
East Midlands	205	7
North East	243	50
Northern	650	161
North Mercia	136	30
South East	241	0
South Mercia	224	7
South West	507	64
Wessex	212	15
Total	2,560	334

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the cost of the common agricultural policy to UK taxpayers and consumers.

Mr. Waldegrave: On the basis of OECD analysis of the total cost of agricultural support within the EU, I estimate that the cost of the common agricultural policy to UK taxpayers and consumers is about £4 per person per week, if world prices are judged to be the same in the absence of the CAP. In practice, removal of agricultural support would reduce agricultural production and raise world prices. In this respect, that figure is therefore likely to overstate the true cost of the CAP.

I have placed in the Library of the House a note setting out the calculations underlying this estimate.

Lairaging, Coventry Airport

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what lairaging and associated facilities there are at Coventry airport for calves awaiting transport when aircraft are delayed due to *(a)* bad weather, *(b)* aircraft failure and *(e)* other factors;

(2) what is the capacity of the lairage at Coventry airport; how far distant is it; how many alternative holding premises there are; and what measures are being taken to prevent the spread of infection in very young calves during these holding operations.

Mrs. Browning: There are no designated lairage facilities at or near Coventry airport, although in an emergency officials would require the unloading of calves into one of the hangers at the airport. Currently, the contingency plan of the exporters concerned, in the event of delays to flight plans, is to take the calves back to the premises of origin. Officials will use their powers where necessary to ensure that calves do not go for longer than 15 hours from the start of their journey without being fed and rested.

Dangerous Wild Animals

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to include American mink, Arctic fox and Racoon dog in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The Farm Animal Welfare Council recently recommended that consideration should be given to the inclusion of these animals in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. Interested organisations have been consulted on this recommendation and their views will be taken into account before any conclusions are reached as to how this matter should be taken forward.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Intervention Board, *(b)* the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and *(c)* his Department.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am pleased to say that the rate of sickness absence in my Department is already well below the civil service average. Nevertheless, a fundamental review has been undertaken of existing arrangements for the management of sick absence in the core Department and a range of measures designed to introduce even more effective controls are now being developed.

Responsibility for such matters within the Intervention Board and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate has been delegated to the agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply direct.

Letter from Guy Stapleton to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 3 March 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about sick absence control measures in the Intervention Board as this is within my operational responsibility.

The Agency employs the full range of Civil Service procedures for dealing with staff who have problems with recurring or long-term sick leave. Where appropriate, this involves personnel action, with individual counselling and the use of informal and formal warnings aimed at resolving problems and improving attendance. Professional advice on prognoses is obtained from the Civil Service Occupational Health Service (CSOHS) at fixed trigger points or at any time when it is felt this is warranted by the circumstances. There is also input to this process from our Welfare Officer. Following professional advice, early medical retirement may take place or, in the absence of any improvement despite advice and counselling, the inefficiency procedures may be initiated which can lead to dismissal on grounds of poor attendance.

I commissioned a review in the Agency's Personnel Group during 1994 with the objective of achieving better overall management control of sick absence cases. Recommendations from the review for strengthening the current arrangements, in particular in respect of our approach to individual cases involving regular, short-term absences, were approved by the Agency's Management Group and will be introduced in 1995. The changes will clarify the division of responsibility between personnel and operational managements, and will give more emphasis to the devolvement to managers of the front-line control measures that need to be taken immediately following the return of any member of staff after sick leave. To help implement the new arrangements, we are planning to provide revised written guidance and a bespoke training programme for all managers in the Agency. The aim will be to ensure a consistent and effective policy for the handling of sick leave cases throughout the Agency.

To supplement the administrative changes and improved control measures, the review also made a number of recommendations to improve the level of general staff awareness about the negative aspects of sick absence. Accordingly, we also propose to issue a booklet for circulation to all staff that describes the impact that sick absences can have on the overall level of service that we provide to our customers, as well as the cost and efficiency implications this has for the smooth running of the department. The general aim will be to heighten awareness about individual responsibility and the impact that sick leave has on the organisation, as well as the additional pressure it imposes for immediate work colleagues.

We consider that an important factor in the success of these changes will be to achieve, as far as possible, the understanding and support of staff and the Trade Union Side. The Agency is making a clear commitment that the changes are aimed at improving the dialogue and communication that takes place when staff have sick leave problems. We have no intention of diluting or neglecting the normal duty of care that we have towards our employees and we shall continue to act reasonably and fairly towards all our staff on these issues.

Finally, while it is somewhat difficult to forecast the impact these changes will have, we are, nevertheless, setting ourselves ambitious targets to reduce sick absence rates to less than 4.5% in 1995/96 and to under 4% in 1996/97. This represents achieving overall improvements equivalent to around 33% on the level of sick absences recorded last year and of about 40% on the 1992/93 figures.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 8 March 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the measures being taken to combat sickness absenteeism in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

You are aware from my earlier letters of 20 December 1994 and 30 January 1995 of the sickness absenteeism rates in the Directorate over the last 4 years. These are well below the Civil Service average. My senior managers and I receive monthly reports of sickness absence, and the same procedures for the management of such absences are applied as in core MAFF. The Minister has advised you that these have been reviewed, and a range of measures designed to introduce even more effective controls are now being developed. These will apply also to staff in the Directorate.

Livestock Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will show the number of livestock, by type, exported to *(a)* Spain, *(b)* France, *(c)* Italy, *(d)* Portugal and *(e)* Ireland in each year since 1990.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The data requested are shown in the following table.

Numbers of livestock exported from the UK, to selected countries

Type	*Spain*	*France*	*Italy*	*Portugal*	*Irish Republic*
1990					
Bovines	0	149,629	592	0	6,377
Goats	0	52	0	56	0
Poultry	262,093	1,785,243	2,583,019	103,461	5,778,922
Sheep	173	481,135	812	6	93,007
Swine	15,468	19,968	8,603	3,929	32,640
1991					
Bovines	0	201,316	71	0	767
Goats	0	130	1	0	311
Poultry	192,084	3,641,311	3,937,640	102,308	7,675,012
Sheep	185	713,105	13,141	704	104,588
Swine	13,399	24,379	5,589	870	194,512
1992					
Bovines	128	200,556	0	0	3,753
Goats	0	15	170	0	4
Poultry	286,591	2,358,855	4,050,909	60,127	9,642,016
Sheep	5,341	1,160,950	445	49	65,753
Swine	11,173	34,288	5,284	86	287,889
1993					
Bovines	1,816	161,126	994	0	2,108
Goats	0	12	0	0	1
Poultry	414,665	758,793	2,963,058	42,391	6,318,894
Sheep	13,771	469,098	15,885	0	0
Swine	2,191	7,119	10,672	495	84,873
1994 (January–September)					
Bovines	0	170,022	0	0	1,144
Goats	0	0	0	0	0
Poultry	374,765	772,775	3,368,263	45,988	7,865,037
Sheep	10,552	440,794	1,499	0	11,041
Swine	1,883	6,412	4,160	830	83,923

Source:
Central Statistical Office.
Note:
1993 data and that for January to September 1994, based on the new system of recording trade between EU countries (Intrastat), are provisional. They are thought to under-record the true level or exports.

Quarantine Arrangements

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what security restrictions are applied to quarantine arrangements for imported non-human primates.

Mrs. Browning: The statutory requirements which apply to authorised quarantine premises are set out in the licences granted under article 9 of the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974. They include details on the construction and dimension of the perimeter surrounds and the requirements for the construction of the units. These conditions are designed to ensure that full rabies security is maintained while imported animals—including non-human primates—covered by the order are in quarantine. All quarantine premises are inspected regularly by MAFF veterinary officers and at least once a week by MAFF appointed veterinary/medical supervisors to ensure that satisfactory standards are maintained.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if imported primates are always quarantined in areas without non-quarantined animals.

Mrs. Browning: Specific authority must be granted by this Ministry before imported primates can be quarantined in a unit with non-quarantined animals, for example at a zoo. Quarantine restrictions then apply to all the animals in the unit.

Imported Primates

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are taken to identify cause of death in imported primates; and what security measures are taken in these circumstances.

Mrs. Browning: Where a primate dies in quarantine, the whole carcase is sent to the Centre of Applied Microbiology and Research, Porton Down for rabies tests and post-mortem examination under secure conditions. Strict procedures have been laid down for the packaging and conveying of carcases to CAMR.

Where the animal has been sharing accommodation, all the survivors are kept in quarantine until the results of the tests are known.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how potentially infected materials from imported primates are disposed of and decontaminated.

Mrs. Browning: All quarantine premises must use an incinerator, or other means accepted as satisfactory by the Ministry, for the disposal of carcases, faeces, clippings, uneaten food and other waste. If possible, the incinerator should be within the perimeter fence, and enclosed.

Where the incinerator is outside the perimeter fence, it must have its own lockable fence and be inaccessible to animals, and all waste must be carried to it in leak-proof sealed containers.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what restrictions are placed on the movement, handling and travelling environments of non-human primates entering the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Browning: Under the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and other Mammals) Order 1974, all non-human primate imports into Great Britain have to be licensed and the animals have to spend six months in authorised quarantine premises. Animals may arrive only at designated ports and airports and must be transported to their quarantine premises by carrying agents authorised by MAFF to transport monkeys. The carrying agent must, within 24 hours of the landing, inform the Ministry of the landing of the animal and its conveyance to the quarantine premises. The veterinary/medical supervisor for the quarantine premises must also confirm the arrival of the animal to the Ministry within seven days.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are taken to identify potential filovirus contamination of animals before importation into the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Browning: Although there is no statutory requirement to test animals for potential filovirus contamination before importation into the United Kingdom, many of the animals are tested either before or after import as part of the normal health screening by the importing companies. Since 1990, a total of about 1,000 monkeys have been tested. None has revealed any evidence of filovirus infection.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines are issued to persons handling imported non-human primates, promoting awareness of potential health risks and minimising the risks of infection.

Mrs. Browning: The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 require employers involved in work that might expose staff to biological agents hazardous to health to provide their employees with enough information, instruction and training for them to know what the risks are, and what precautions to take.

To assist employers in meeting their statutory obligations, the Medical Research Council produces specific guidance on infectious hazards in simians which is entitled "The Management of Simians in Relation to Infectious Hazards to Staff".

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what action he is taking to reduce unemployment in Coventry; and what *(a)* job creation schemes and *(b)* training schemes he will initiate;

(2) what measures he proposes to tackle long-term unemployment in Coventry.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from R. M. Phillips to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 9 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Employment has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your questions about the action being taken to reduce unemployment in Coventry, in particular, the measures to combat long-term unemployment through job creations schemes and training initiatives.

Claimant unemployment in the Coventry local authority area has fallen by nearly 22% in the twelve months to January. This was the greatest percentage reduction of any authority area in the whole of the West Midlands region. The number of long-term unemployed for the Coventry local authority area also fell by 25%, the second largest fall amongst all regional authority areas.

The number of employer vacancies notified to Jobcentres in the same area increased by 41.8% for the twelve month period ending January. This too was the largest increase in notified vacancies for any authority area in the West Midlands region. I can also report that Coventry, and the Warwickshire county, have been allocated £22.54m from the Single Regeneration Budget, calculated to lead to the creation and preservation of 2,600 new jobs, and the provision of 1,950 training places. Over 60% of funds allocated will go towards establishing projects for disadvantaged areas and groups in Coventry.

The Employment Service (ES) actively markets and delivers its programmes and services to unemployed jobseekers, especially disadvantaged groups and the long-term unemployed, as part of its Annual Performance Agreement with the Department of Employment. In the eleven months up to February, the ES in Coventry placed 3,318 long-term unemployed people into jobs, and 1,765 people on the adult vocational Training-for-Work programme. All unemployed people who do not manage to find work within 13 weeks of their date of registration, are given a personal interview with an experienced employment adviser, where efforts to find work are reviewed and options for getting back to work, including vocational training, are explored. There are a number of active employment measures, including Job Plan Workshops, Jobclubs, Work Trials, and the Job Interview Guarantee scheme, which operate in the Coventry area, aimed specifically at long-term unemployed.

Two years ago, an Enterprise and Advice Centre was set up in Coventry, Hillfields, to encourage local residents to access training and education opportunities. The centre is a local partnership initiative between the ES, Training and Enterprise Council, Careers Service, Jobclubs and other community based organisations. In the three months up to February, the centre assisted over 1,200 local people.

There are also several local projects aimed at equipping ethnic minority and other disadvantaged groups with the skills needed to access training, education and job opportunities. Again, these partnership projects are funded centrally, but managed and delivered locally through community "outreach" facilities to ensure training and access provision is targeted at, and available to disadvantaged groups in areas of high and long-term unemployment.

From April, Coventry will pilot a new employer recruitment subsidy scheme known as Workstart. This initiative, which will run for a year, is designed to test the effectiveness of encouraging employers to recruit people unemployed for two years or more by paying them a subsidy.

With regard to more general recruitment in Coventry, Barclays Bank is creating between 500–1000 new jobs for its national telephone banking headquarters—BarclayCall, in the Walsgrave area of the city. The ES is already assisting Barclays with its vacancy filling by delivering job preparation courses for prospective employees and have so far placed 50 clients into jobs, 31% of whom were long-term unemployed jobseekers.

I hope you will find this labour market information about the Coventry area helpful.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of public funds devoted to reducing unemployment are devoted to the long-term unemployed.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's forecast expenditure for 1994–95 is £3.7 billion. Of this, some £1 billion is directed specifically to helping long-term unemployed people. This includes £693 million on training for work in England and around £300 million for the range of assistance offered by the Employment Service, such as community action, jobclubs, jobplan workshops and restart.

In addition, the Department plans to spend some £95 million more over the next three years on the measures to help long-term unemployed people find work, such as jobmatch, workstart and work trials. These measures were announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, column 1079.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the consultants, *(b)* the tasks for which they were employed and *(c)* the payments made to them from his Department's budget in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Miss Widdecombe: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

European Social Fund

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the allocation of the European social fund for the current programming period to *(a)* Government programmes, *(b)* each of the objective 1, 2 and 5b regions and *(c)* each of the non-Government sectors, giving distinctions between England, Wales and Scotland where appropriate.

Miss Widdecombe: Allocations to Government and non-Government sectors under objective 3 of the European Community structural funds for the 1994–95 programme period are shown in table 1. The allocations in respect of Government programmes form part of the objective 3 plan agreed last year with the European Commission. Non-Government sector allocations for 1994 and 1995 were subsequently settled with the objective 3 monitoring committee. Figures for 1996 will be agreed later this year.

Table 2 shows the European social fund components of the allocations to regions and sub-regions made under objectives 1, 2 and 5(b) of the structural funds. For the objective 1 regions, the programming period covers the years 1994 to 1999; for objective 2 the years 1994 to 1996.

Table 1: Objective 3 sector allocations: 1994 to 1996

£ million

Sector	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Government	222.000	231.000	244.000

Non-Government sectors

£ million

Sector	*1994*	*1995*
Voluntary sector	28.637	28.984
Training and Enterprise Councils	18.000	18.218
Industrial Training Organisations	5.403	5.468
Local authorities (England and Wales)	19.825	20.065
Local authorities (Scotland)	9.085	2.753
Further education (Scotland)	9.085	6.442
Further education (England)	43.503	44.030
Further education (Wales)	2.735	2.768
Higher education	21.401	21.660
Gibraltar	0.720	0.730

Allocations are shown in 1994 prices and have been converted to sterling using an exchange rate of 1.29 ecu = £1. The allocation for Gibraltar is included in the UK's overall allocation—and funded from the Government allocation.

Table 2: Objective 1, 2 and 5b regional allocations: 1994 to 1999 Objective

£million

Region	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*Total*
Merseyside	35.953	38.891	41.690	44.589	48.465	52.434	262.023
Highlands and Islands	6.430	6.740	7.130	7.290	7.600	7.600	42.790

Objective 2

£ million

Region	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*Total*
North-east England	18.977	19.791	20.922	59.690
West Cumbria and Furness	1.519	1.589	1.682	4.791
North-west England	24.318	25.349	26.845	76.512
East midlands	4.866	5.074	5.370	15.310
Yorkshire and Humberside	19.692	20.308	21.240	61.240
West midlands	22.915	23.884	25.295	72.093
Greater London	4.558	4.752	5.031	14.341
Thanet	0.518	0.540	0.571	1.628
Plymouth	1.411	1.465	1.543	4.419
Industrial south Wales	11.581	12.078	12.775	36.434
Eastern Scotland	5.960	6.220	6.580	18.760
Western Scotland	15.550	16.210	17.150	48.910
Gibraltar	0.222	0.231	0.245	0.698

Objective 5(b)

£ million

Region	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*Total*
Northern uplands	1.496	1.961	2.264	2.271	2.279	2.287	12.558
East Anglia	1.081	1.081	1.081	1.204	1.204	1.326	6.977
English marches	0.812	1.078	1.247	1.255	1.260	1.264	6.916
Devon and Cornwall	3.030	3.960	4.583	4.612	4.629	4.650	25.464
Lincolnshire	0.724	0.967	1.120	1.132	1.132	1.147	6.222
Derbyshire/Staffordshire	0.163	0.221	0.178	0.256	0.257	0.260	1.335
Rural Wales	3.070	4.016	4.643	4.674	4.690	4.721	25.814
Dumfries and Galloway	0.630	0.820	0.950	0.950	0.960	0.960	5.270
Borders	0.550	0.720	0.840	0.840	0.850	0.850	4.650
Grampian	0.560	0.730	0.840	0.850	0.850	0.860	4.690
Rural Stirling and upper Tayside	0.590	0.620	0.640	0.660	0.670	0.700	3.880

Allocations are shown in 1994 prices except for the English marches, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire/Staffordshire programmes which are shown in 1995 prices. All allocations have been converted to sterling using an exchange rate of 1.29 ecu = £1.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the latest allocations of funds from the European social fund objective 3 for the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: The most recent allocations for Great Britain under objective 3 of the European Community structural funds are shown in the following table:

Date	*Million ECU*
1994	478
1995	497
1996	526

Northern Ireland receives separate allocations.

Employment Opportunities (Epileptics)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures are being taken by his Department to improve the employment opportunities of people with epilepsy other than his Department's booklet on the subject.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government have introduced the Disability Discrimination Bill which, if enacted, will make it unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person, including a person with epilepsy, less favourably because of his or her disability, without justifiable reason.

The Department also has a wide range of initiatives and services which help enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including those with epilepsy. We will continue our programme of educating and persuading employers to adopt good employment practices for disabled people. We will also continue to provide effective practical help to both employers and disabled individuals.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in the Employment Service.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 9 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the measures being taken to combat sickness absenteeism in the Employment Service (ES).

A sickness absence management initiative has been in place in the ES since 1991. This came about because of concerns about sickness levels in the organisation at that time and the need to manage it more effectively.

The main elements of the initiative included:

(a) the provision of a leaflet for people returning to work about sickness absence and a requirement for managers to talk to such staff, to check what the problem was, whether they were fully fit for work, and find out whether additional support and advice was needed; and

(b) a requirement for individuals to phone in by an agreed time on the first day of their illness, to tell their manager they were ill, so that cover for their job could be arranged during their absence.

The rationale behind the initiative was to provide more effective help to those who really needed it, and to take a firmer line with those whose absences may have been questionable. Sickness absence has fallen from around 7% in 1991 to around 4% in 1994.

More recently, the success of this initiative has been developed further with a number of changes being made to the ES Personnel Handbook. One of the changes to the inefficiency procedure was a reduction in the number of days sickness absence which an employee can take before consideration is given to inefficiency action. Previously, the limits were 14 or 21 days in a 12 month period, depending on age. Since 31 October 1994, the new trigger point has been 12 working days for everyone irrespective of age and also includes part day sickness absences.

A full evaluation will be conducted in the autumn, when the arrangements have been in place for a full year.

I hope this is helpful.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements he will make to ensure that individual contractors which submitted claims for work carried out for STTEC are reimbursed in full.

Mr. Paice: Whether contractors are paid for services contracted for with South Thames training and enterprise council will depend upon the source of the funding and the timing of the work done. For Government-funded programmes—excluding employer investment in people—payments will be made to providers for properly substantiated claims for work done since 7 November 1994. Employer investment in people contractors will be paid for work done after 21 December 1994—the date of the appointment of the receiver. Payment for discretionary programmes funded from TEC reserves after 21

December 1994 are a matter for the receiver. All contractors are unsecured creditors to the TEC for payments relating to work on Government programmes—excluding employer investment in people—before 7 November 1994 and all other forms of contract and employer investment in people prior to 21 December 1994.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total amount of money which was pledged by the South Thames TEC to training providers based in the Dulwich constituency for the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. Paice: The information is not held by the Department.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total amount of money owing to individual contractors which submitted claims for payment for work carried out for South Thames TEC before the appointment of the receiver.

Mr. Paice: The total amount of money owing to individual contractors which submitted claims for payment for work carried out for South Thames training and enterprise council, before the appointment of the receiver, is a matter for the receiver.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements he will make to ensure that Waverley school in Dulwich receives the £75,000 it was promised by the South Thames TEC before going into receivership.

Mr. Paice: The £75,000 referred to in the question breaks down into six separate programmes. Two of these, compact and careers initiative, are Government-funded programmes covered by the comfort arrangements so the school will receive funding for these programmes for work undertaken since 7 November 1994. However, for any moneys owing for activities undertaken before 7 November, the school is an unsecured creditor. Investors in people is Government-funded, but comfort has not been extended to this programme as it benefits organisations rather than individuals. The school is an unsecured creditor to the training and enterprise council for this programme before 21 December, the date of the receiver's appointment. Claims for work done after 21 December should be submitted to the receiver.

The school effectiveness pilot and the technology bid are South Thames TEC initiatives funded from the TEC's own reserves. The Government are not committed to continue to fund discretionary programmes financed from the TEC's reserves. The Waverley school is an unsecured creditor to the TEC for the two latter programmes for payments relating to work done prior to the receiver's appointment on 21 December. Whether invoices for any such work done after 21 December are paid is a matter for the receiver. The personal effectiveness programme initiative is Government funded. It offers the use of a consultancy service rather than providing funding direct to the school. This service will continue to be delivered under the normal conditions.

Jobcentres

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training is given to district managers in the Employment Service on the geographic locations of jobcentres, the constituencies they fall in and the communities they serve; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

World Wide Web

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make provision for *(a)* political parties and *(b)* hon. Members to place material in a specifically designated section of the World Wide Web server www.open.gov.uk in order to contribute to political debate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Horam: The World Wide Web server, www.open.gov.uk, provides Internet access to the CCTA Government information service. This service is intended specifically for Government information to be placed there by CCTA on behalf of Departments of State. There are no plans to extend its use to include political material from either parties or individuals.

However, the Government fully support the principle of open political debate, and the CCTA Government information service has a number of collaborative open groups that are designed to encourage such discussion, through electronic mail. Details can be found at the World Wide Web address:

www.open.gov.uk/cogs/coglist.htm.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those studies by the Medical Research Council into a genetic risk factor in late-onset Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Horam: The details of the relevant research projects funded by the Medical Research Council are as follows:

Direct support through MRC's own units:

MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge

Project Title: Understanding pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease.

Indirect support through grants to researchers in higher education institutions:

Dr. J. Xuereb and Dr. C. M. Wischik

Dept. of Psychiatry,

Cambridge university

Project title: Cambridge Brain Bank's contribution to clinical/epidemiological studies of dementia and Alzheimer's disease research.

Professor D. Brock

Dept. of Medicine

Edinburgh university

Project title: Mutation analysis in Alzheimer's disease

Professor P. Lantos and Professor C. D. Marsden

Dept. of neuropathology,

Institute of Psychiatry

London

Project title: A London brain bank for research on Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease

Professor R. Williamson and Dr. M. Rossor

Dept. of biochemistry and molecular genetics

St. Mary's hospital medical school

London

Project title: Familial dementias and Alzheimer's disease

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much research into the causes and treatment of Alzheimer's disease was funded by the Government in 1993–94; and what is the expected level of expenditure in 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Horam: In the last financial year for which figures are available—1993–94—the Medical Research Council, which receives its funding from my Department, spent £4.5 million on research projects directly related to Alzheimer's disease and a further £5.3 million on projects which may in part have some relevance to the condition.

It is not possible to provide figures for the council's future funding of research proposals as this will depend on the quality and nature of research applications received. However, the council is always willing to discuss and consider sound, scientifically based proposals for research into Alzheimer's disease.

The universities and medical schools may also be funding research into Alzheimer's disease, although this information is not held centrally.

The Department of Health does not at present fund research specifically into the treatment of the disease.

Epilepsy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much money the Medical Research Council plans to spend in 1995–96 and 1996–97 on *(a)* research into epilepsy and *(b)* research which may be relevant to the condition.

Mr. Horam: It is not possible to provide figures for the Medical Research Council's future funding of research proposals as this will depend on the quality and nature of research applications received. The council is always willing to discuss and consider sound, scientifically based proposals for research into epilepsy.

Security Classifications

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent changes have been made in the definitions of the security classifications "confidential" and "commercial in confidence" in the light of the Government's commitment to open government; and what guidance has been circulated to civil servants on the use of such classifications.

Mr. Horam: Until 3 April 1994, the definition of the classification "confidential" was:

"Information and material the unauthorised disclosure of which would be damaging to the interests of the nation".

Until the same date, "commercial in confidence" was one of a number of privacy markings and its purpose was to enable appropriate protection to be given to information relating to a commercial undertaking's processes or affairs and which may have been of commercial value to its competitors or to speculators. Following a review of protective security, the classification system and the privacy marking system were replaced by a harmonised system of protective markings.

The new definition of "confidential" is:

"The compromise of this information or material would be likely: materially to damage diplomatic relations—ie cause formal protest or other sanction—to prejudice individual security or liberty; to cause damage to the operational effectiveness or security of UK or allied forces or the effectiveness of valuable security or intelligence operations; to work substantially against national finances or economic and commercial interest; substantially to undermine the financial viability of major organisations; to impede the investigation or facilitate the commission of serious crime; to impede seriously the development or operation of major government policies; to shut down or otherwise substantially disrupt significant national operations".

Privacy markings, such as "commercial in confidence", have been abolished. They have been replaced by descriptors which can be used, normally in conjunction with any one of the four protective markings—top secret, secret, confidential, and restricted—to indicate what sort of sensitive material—commercial, staff, management, and so on—is being protected. Guidance about the use of the protective marking system has been issued to departments and agencies as part of wider guidance on protective security.

The new protective marking system is consistent with the code of practice on access to Government information. The guidance on interpretation of the code of practice, which has been issued to all Departments and agencies subject to the code and has been placed in the Library, makes it clear that the arrangements for marking information help to ensure the physical security of information which is exempt from disclosure under the code. It also makes clear that information does not need to be protectively marked to be exempt from disclosure under the code, and that a protective marking cannot be taken, without further examination, to mean that all the information contained in a document is properly exempt from disclosure.

DEFENCE

Road Traffic Regulations (Exemptions)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what exemptions his Department's vehicles and drivers are entitled to in respect of road traffic regulations.

Mr. Freeman: My Department's vehicles and their drivers are entitled to various exemptions under a wide variety of road traffic regulations. It is our policy, however, to comply with all regulations where operational effectiveness is not impaired.

No central record of the exemptions is maintained and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in his Department.

Mr. Freeman: My Department is aware of the need to seek positive ways to combat sickness absenteeism. At present, initiatives include: a thorough absence reporting system; procedures for dealing with excessive absence; courses and seminars on stress management; a comprehensive welfare service; and education for line managers in occupational monitoring and improving staff attendance rates.

Albania

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what types of logistical support equipment

Albania has requested from the United Kingdom in the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: It is not our normal practice to make public the substance of intergovernmental discussions on potential military assistance. In the case of assistance to Albania, no decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Harris and Mr. Wilmott

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total amount of time that Messrs. Harris and Wilmott were suspended from their posts as press officers in Plymouth; and what level of pay they received during their suspension;

(2) what was the total amount of money in dispute in the expense claims of Messrs. Harris and Wilmott which led to their suspension as press officers in Plymouth;

(3) what was the total cost of the investigation by his Department into the expense claims of Messrs. Harris and Wilmott who are employed by his Department in Plymouth as press officers; and who was responsible for conducting the inquiry;

(4) if he will place in the Library the report into the investigations of Messrs. Harris and Wilmott, press officers in his Department.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer Thursday 2 March 1995]:* Mr. Harris and Mr. Wilmott were suspended from duty from 20 April 1994, until 8 November 1994 and 19 January 1995 respectively. They were paid full salaries during these periods.

Both cases involved investigation by the Ministry of Defence police, which, until 12 January 1995, was a mandatory requirement in cases that involved alleged fraud. Since then, line management has been granted a degree of discretion on police investigation and this is no longer mandatory in minor cases of alleged fraud. It was established, following independent inquiry, that no indication to defraud had existed in these cases. The length of time taken in these cases was partly accounted for by postponements of the hearings at the request of the defendants, and partly by the need for consultation between line management and MOD personnel specialists following the hearing to ensure fair treatment for both officers.

The total cost of the investigation could not be separately identified, but each was chaired by a member of staff outside the management structure of the officers concerned. It is not my Department's practice to make available confidential information on staff matters.

Defence Housing Executive

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what dates *(a)* the Crown Housing Trust will cease to exist and *(b)* the Defence Housing Executive will commence operating;

(2) where the Crown Housing Trust currently operates from; and where the Defence Housing Executive will be based.

Mr. Soames: The original proposal to set up a housing trust encountered difficulties, and the trust was therefore never formally established. The Defence Housing Executive is on course to assume responsibility for the management and maintenance of the married quarters estate from 1 April 1995. The staff initially recruited to set up the housing trust were originally accommodated in Ministry of Defence offices in London. From 1 August 1994, the staff involved, who have subsequently been working on setting up the Defence Housing Executive moved to other Government offices in central London. The Defence Housing Executive is also in the process of appointing regional and area staff throughout the country; as existing service or Ministry of Defence civilian personnel, these staff are accommodated in either Defence or common user estate property. It is expected that these arrangements will continue.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) who was responsible for appointing the employees of the Crown Housing Trust; and who will be responsible for appointing the employees of the Defence Housing Executive;

(2) if the chief executive of the Crown Housing Trust is eligible for consideration for the post of chief executive of the Defence Housing Executive.

Mr. Soames: The chief executive, designate, housing director, designate, and finance director, designate, of the trust were appointed by my Department following open competition and in accordance with the recommendations of an appointments board chaired by the First Civil Service Commission. Other staff of the embryo trust organisation were serving civil servants and agency support staff. Arrangements for the appointment of a chief executive for the Defence Housing Executive have yet to be finalised. The other staff of the executive are being drawn from the Department's civilian and service personnel resources; it is envisaged that a limited number of appointments will in due course be made by means of open competition where the required expertise is not available within Government personnel resources.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department will be setting annual targets for the Defence Housing Executive for the number of vacant dwellings among Ministry of Defence-owned properties.

Mr. Soames: In common with all Government Departments holding residential property, my Department agrees annually with the Department of the Environment a target for a reduction in the number of void properties it holds. Achievement of the target to be agreed for my Department for 1995–96 will be the responsibility of the Defence Housing Executive.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have signed contracts to work with the Defence Housing Executive.

Mr. Soames: Arrangements for the appointment of a chief executive for the Defence Housing Executive have yet to be finalised. The other staff of the executive are being drawn from my Department's civilian and service personnel resources; it is envisaged that a limited number of appointments will in due course be made by means of open competition where the required expertise is not available within Government personnel resources.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of renting office accommodation for his Department's housing trust and Defence Housing Executive; where are the offices; and for how long they have been rented.

Mr. Soames: The staff initially recruited to set up the housing trust were originally accommodated in Ministry of Defence offices in London. From 1 August 1994, the staff involved, who have subsequently been working on

setting up the Defence Housing Executive, moved to other Government offices in central London. The rental cost to the end of February 1995 is some £191,000. The Defence Housing Executive is also in the process of appointing regional and area staff throughout the country; as existing service or Ministry of Defence civilian personnel, these staff are accommodated in either defence or common user estate property. It is expected that these arrangements will continue.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will specify the total payments to date made to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* NatWest Markets and *(c)* Savills for work carried out in respect of his Department's plans for the married quarters housing stock; and whether this work is still continuing;

(2) if he will provide a breakdown for the total cost to date of his Department's plans for the married quarters housing stock;

(3) what is the total annual cost of legal advice for work associated with the Defence Housing Trust and Defence Housing Executive.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total amount spent on the Crown Housing Trust since its establishment.

Mr. Soames: The total cost to date of work on new arrangements for the married quarters estate is some £5.4 million. Much of this investment is being realised in the establishment of the Defence Housing Executive, and much of it is also relevant to any form of transfer of the married quarters estate to the private section. The breakdown of these costs is as follows:

£ thousand

	Financial year 1991–92	*Financial year 1992–93*	*Financial year 1993–94*	*Financial year 1994–95*	*Total*
Internal costs	—	—	312	857	1,169
External costs					
Legal advice	—	3	102	825	930
Other professional fees	8	13	462	2,852	3,335
Total	8	16	876	4,534	5,434

Notes:
1. All costs shown are outturn prices exclusive of VAT for external costs. VAT is refunded to the Department on "contracted-out services" such as legal advice, agency staff and other professional services.
2. Internal costs are primarily salary costs and office accommodation, but cover also such items as office machinery, computers and stationery.
3. External costs for financial year 1994–95 take account of invoices received to date.

Payments to individual companies are commercially confidential. The possibility of further work for such companies depends on the outcome of the competitive selection of financial and other advisers which we are at present carrying out, and on any future need for advice which may be identified.

Severance Payments

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of all cases in which employees of his Department have received severance payments in excess of *(c)* 100,000 after less than 12 months service for each of the last three years.

Mr. Soames: There have been no such cases.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many GCHQ staff have been placed at Menwith Hill station in each year since 1992, to date and on what basis; what are their primary duties; to whom do they report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: There is a significant GCHQ presence at Menwith Hill station. It is not Government policy however to give more detailed information on the deployment of GCHQ staff. I refer the hon. Member to the Adjournment debate of 25 March 1994 concerning Menwith Hill station, *Official Report*, columns 609–16.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about GCHQ staff at Menwith Hill station intercepting domestic and international telephone calls.

Mr. Soames: None.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will permit right hon. and hon. Members to visit Menwith Hill station in north Yorkshire to inspect the station and to be briefed on the activities currently undertaken there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: For operational and security reasons, such visits are not allowed.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the progress by the National Security Agency of America, in respect of complaints made by Ms Lindis Percy, of Bradford, about her treatment by American military personnel when detained by them at Menwith Hill station; what rights Ms Percy has to take legal action against American military personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I am unaware of any incidents at Menwith Hill station in which Ms Percy has been detained by American military personnel. It is not for my Department to advise Ms Percy on her legal rights.

Hospitality

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what types of hospitality members of his Department have been forbidden to receive from companies bidding for defence contracts; on what date the restriction was imposed; and if he will specify the instructions provided to members of his Department concerning hospitality and receiving gifts from defence contractors.

Mr. Freeman: The principles of conduct which govern how members of my Department should react to offers of

gifts and hospitality have been in place for many years. They are brought to the attention of all staff in a publication which is issued annually. Staff must not accept hospitality which includes overnight accommodation, transport costs, or offers of such things as holidays and the use of vehicles. Invitations of a social kind should normally be declined unless attendance can be demonstrated to be in the interests of the Department. Trivial gifts may be retained, where they are occasional and where acceptance would not give rise to public concern.

Western European Union

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions in the last year he has met *(a)* his French and *(b)* his German counterparts to discuss his Department's ideas for the development of the Western European Union; and what were the outcomes of these meetings.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has regularly met his French and German counterparts over the past year to discuss a wide range of issues that have on occasion included matters concerning the Western European Union.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the actions his Department are promoting to develop the Western European Union's planning and command and control capacities.

Mr. Soames: The actions we are promoting are those stated in the memorandum on the United Kingdom's approach to the treatment of European defence issues at the 1996 inter-governmental conference, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. These includes provisional offers of assistance in developing the handling of intelligence and the creation of a situation centre.

Nuclear Weapons Register

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the reasons which led his Department to reject the German Government's proposals in December 1993 for a nuclear weapons register; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 13 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *621–22*.

European Procurement Collaborations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the creation of joint project offices for European procurement collaborations.

Mr. Freeman: The management arrangements for each collaborative defence equipment programme are considered on their merits, with our partners, on a case by case basis. Where there is judged to be the most effective approach, a joint project office may be established.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the use of capability and cost to determine a country's share of work in joint European procurement collaborations.

Mr. Freeman: In negotiations with partners in a collaborative programme, the Department takes into account a number of factors relating to workshares, on a case-by-case basis, consistent with the aim of obtaining value for money. The Department believes that this aim is best achieved by maximising competition in the programme, allowing companies in each partner nation the opportunity to win work on technical and commercial merit.

Ship Charters

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ships were chartered by his Department in each of the last 10 years; and how many of these ships were registered in Britain in each of these years.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Combined Joint Task Force

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if NATO's combined joint task force initiative is now operational; and on which occasions this initiative has been put into operation.

Mr. Soames: NATO is continuing work, in co-ordination with the WEU, on the development and implementation of the combined joint task force concept.

European Nuclear Deterrent

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards a European nuclear deterrent for the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom are committed to NATO and already contribute to overall deterrence and security within Europe. This was recognised by all WEU members at the Noordwijk summit in November 1994.

Nuclear Weapons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards transparency in relation to the possession of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Soames: Our policy is to be as open about our nuclear deterrent as is possible without revealing information which might diminish the effectiveness of the system and so the credibility of our deterrent.

European Defence Industry

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on the rationalisation of the European defence industry.

Mr. Freeman: In principle, I welcome the closer ties which many United Kingdom defence companies are forging with those in Europe and north America. Industrial rationalisation is a process which is primarily for the companies and the markets, subject of course to regulation by the relevant competition authorities. My Department considers mergers which may be of interest to it on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the possible

effects on future competition and any security considerations.

Operation Granby

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimate of the cost of fraud incurred by Britain during Operation Granby.

Mr. Soames: There are no proven cases of fraud associated with Operation Granby. A number of suspected cases concerned with the supply of shipping have been investigated, some of which remain the subject of civil or criminal action.

Compulsory Drug Testing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been tested under the new compulsory drug testing procedures in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy including the Royal Marines and *(c)* the Royal Air force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Army is the only service to have introduced a compulsory drug testing programme. Tests began in January, and by 1 March 436 Army personnel had been tested. The Royal Navy has recently completed an anonymous trial to determine whether there is a need for compulsory drug testing of naval personnel, including the Royal Marines, and a report will be submitted to the Admiralty Board shortly. The RAF does not consider that there is a need to introduce compulsory drug testing at present, but is keeping its position under review.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list *(a)* the consultants, *(b)* the tasks for which they were employed and *(c)* the payments made to them from his Department's budget in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Freeman: In addition to those placed by the central contracts branches, consultancy contracts may be placed as part of a larger project and by individual budget holders where the overall value of the contract is low. Such contracts are placed under delegated contractual authority without reference to the central contracts branches and so cannot be identified centrally.

In view of this and the fact that the Department's central contracts branches have placed in excess of 500 contracts with consultants in each of the last few years, an answer to the hon. Gentleman's question could only be provided at disproportionate cost and effort.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of those service personnel who have served in Northern Ireland since 1969 are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not available, as medical data in the services are not recorded in a way which allows episodes of illness or injury to be linked with operational deployment.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the date, location and circumstances of each incident involving inadvertent release of weaponry from military aircraft outside weapons range areas in the United Kingdom over the last three years.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is shown. All four occurrences involved inadvertent release of inert practice weapons into areas where public access is controlled because of known military activity.

Date	*Location*	*Circumstances*
Royal Air Force		
25 January 1993	RAF Marham	Practice bomb fell from a Tornado GR1 during take-off and landed on the runway.
Fleet Air Arm		
6 October 1992	English Channel (Portland Exercise Area)	Drill missile released from a Lynx in error during simulated attack.
30 March 1993	English Channel (Plymouth Exercise Area)	Drill missile released from a Lynx in error during simulated attack.
19 May 1994	Firth of Clyde (Clyde Exercise Area)	Practice torpedo slipped from recovery equipment during transit by Sea King to beaching site.

Golf Course, Wyton

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the involvement of his Department in the creation of a golf course at Wyton; and what estimate he has made of the cost of this project.

Mr. Soames: It is understood that the Royal Air Force Golf Association, which is a non-public body, is examining the possibility of constructing a golf course on surplus land at RAF Wyton in Cambridgeshire. Should the association decide to proceed with this proposal, the costs, including the purchase of land from my Department, would be met by it.

Helicopter Flying Training

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of helicopter flying training in the three services.

Mr. Soames: Proposals for a defence helicopter flying school were issued on 8 December in a consultation document. During the consultation period, my Department received 14 responses to our proposals.

All these responses have received careful and sympathetic scrutiny. There have been understandable local concerns but widespread general support for the main thrust of the proposals. No significant new defence related arguments have, however, emerged, nor have any new suggestions been made which have caused us to alter our original proposals.

I can therefore confirm that we shall now move to develop our plans along the lines indicated in the consultative document. We shall establish a single tri-service school to provide pre-operational helicopter flying training at Shawbury with effect from April 1997.

Training undertaken by 705 Naval Air Squadron at Culdrose will move to the joint school in 1997. However,

I am pleased to announce that the Royal Navy's fleet requirement and air direction unit will move to Culdrose in December this year when the existing contract at Yeovilton comes to an end. This will help to ensure that Culdrose continues to operate at a very high capacity and its long-term future remains assured as the main operating base of the Merlin anti-submarine warfare helicopter.

I am also pleased to confirm that Middle Wallop will remain the home of Army aviation with responsibility for operational training on all Army aircraft. Moving the Army basic helicopter training to the defence helicopter flying school has released space at Middle Wallop. I can therefore confirm that, in line with our policy of consolidating defence activities, Army activity at Netheravon will be relocated with all Army Air Corps flying moving to Middle Wallop. Netheravon itself will remain in the defence estate and possible alternative uses are being considered.

Much work needs to be done in order to establish the defence helicopter flying school at Shawbury in 1997 and we have therefore put in place a team to effect all elements of the implementation process. We shall continue to consult the trades unions on the details of our plans as they unfold.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 13 March 1995

DEFENCE

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the investigations his Department is conducting into Gulf war veterans suffering deleterious health effects following return from Operation Granby have examined the possibility of a relationship between the innoculations and NAPS tablets given to soldiers and health care personnel sent to the Gulf, and the development of motor neurone disease and leukaemia.

Mr. Soames: My Department considers all postulated causes of the alleged Gulf war syndrome. The possibility of a relationship between innoculations and NAPS tablets and the development of motor neurone disease and leukaemia has been examined. No evidence has been found within the body of medical knowledge to support such a connection.

Training Flights

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many overland training flights down to 100ft above ground level were conducted by the aircrew involved in the radar tracking trials using DA20 aircraft from West Freugh on 14 December 1994, prior to carrying out the trials flying; what was the location of the training flights; and what was the involvement of the Royal Air Force instructors in the training;

(2) how many flights below 250ft above ground level were conducted by DA20 aircraft on radar trials from West Freugh during December; and what was the minimum authorised altitude for these flights.

Mr. Soames: Only one sortie below 250ft above ground level was flown by this aircraft, on 19 December; this involved a number of passes over the airfield at West Freugh. No sorties were flown below 250ft above ground level on other dates in December, nor were Royal Air Force instructors involved. The aircraft was operating under civil aviation regulations, and was authorised to fly down to a minimum authorised altitude of 100ft above ground level by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Italian Tornados

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the deployment of Italian Air Force Tornado aircraft to RAF Cottesmore in early December 1994; how many aircraft took part; which Royal Air Force unit hosted the visit; whether the visit was a NATO-sponsored unit exchange; how many low-level sorties were undertaken by the aircraft during the deployment, and at what minimum permitted altitudes; how many of these sorties included use of the Spadeadam range; and what breaches of flying regulations have been reported in respect of flying by the aircraft involved in the deployment.

Mr. Soames: Eight Italian Air Force Tornado aircraft were deployed to RAF Cottesmore, which hosted the visit, from 5 to 9 December; the purpose was to utilise the electronic warfare tactics range at RAF Spadeadam and carry out low-flying training within the United Kingdom low-flying system. The deployment was not part of a NATO squadron exchange. A total of 19 low-level sorties were flown, 11 of which involved the use of the Spadeadam range; the authorised minimum separation distance for each sortie was 500ft. There have been no reported breaches of flying regulations.

Sea Service

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the numbers of commissioned officers of each rank in the Royal Navy, differentiating between male and female officers of equivalent rank and indicating how many of the officers in each group have served at sea *(a)* at that rank or *(b)* at a lower rank.

(2) if he will list the numbers of petty officers and ratings of each rank in the Royal Navy, differentiating between male and female personnel of equivalent rank and indicating how many in each group have served tours of duty at sea.

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the precise form requested. A table showing the number of personnel serving on the trained strength of the Royal Navy—indicating chaplains and medical and dental officers—as at 1 January by rank and gender, together with the percentage of those personnel who have served at sea, is as follows. It should be noted that drafts and appointments to some ships—in refit or extended readiness, for example—do not count as sea service, and have been excluded. Additionally, some records which pre-date computerisation, particularly those of the more senior officers, may not be complete.

Officers

	Male		*Female*	
Rank	*Total*	*Sea per cent.*	*Total*	*Sea per cent.*
Admiral	4	100	0	0
Vice Admiral	13	85	0	0
Rear Admiral	27	72	0	0
Captain	356	93	3	0
Commander	1,125	96	12	25
Lieutenant Commander	2,292	95	42	45
Lieutenant	2,664	88	201	48
Sub Lieutenant/Midshipman	230	86	24	50
Total	6,711	92	282	46

Petty Officers and Ratings

	Male		*Female*	
Rate	*Total*	*Sea per cent.*	*Total*	*Sea per cent.*
Warrant Officer	819	97	10	20
Chief Petty Officer	6,973	99	102	13
Petty Officer	5,848	98	329	22
Leading Rate	6,732	99	732	29

Petty Officers and Ratings

Rate	Male Total	Male Sea per cent.	Female Total	Female Sea per cent.
Able/Ordinary Rate	11,271	95	1,655	58
Total	31,643	97	2,838	45

Plutonium

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what complaints he has received about heavy goods vehicles carrying plutonium in police convoys travelling at over 70 mph on motorways.

Mr. Soames: I have received no such complaints.

Employees, Hampshire

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were employed in the defence industry in Hampshire in each year since 1989.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of United Kingdom regular service and Ministry of Defence civilian personnel working in Hampshire in 1 July in the years in question are set as follows. Figures for employment in defence-related industries are not available below the level of economic planning region.

	Service[1]	Civilian[2]	Total
1989	36,715	20,397.5	57,112.5
1990	34,254	20,112.0	54,366.0
1991	33,412	20,111.0	53,523.0
1992	31,742	19,532.0	51,274.0
1993	29,794	18,168.5	47,962.5
1994	29,092	18,473.0	47,565.0

[1] The 1994 figure for UK regular service personnel is provisional.
[2] Permanent staff counted as full time equivalents. The figure for 1992 is at 1 October.

Defence Land Agency

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the outcome of investigations by Ministry of Defence police into the activities of certain employees of the Defence Land Agency relating to the disposal of Ministry of Defence property in south-west England, described in his answer of 12 April 1994, *Official Report*, column *148*.

Mr. Soames: This matter is still under investigation and papers now rest with the Crown Prosecution Service.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Women Ministers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, pursuant to his answer of 23 February, *Official Report*, column *333*, by how much the Commissioners' allocation to stipends has been reduced in the current year as a result of providing for resignations under the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure 1993; what are the expected cuts in the allocation to stipends for this reason in each of the next three years; and if he will give his latest estimate of the cost of financial provision under the Measure on the same basis as the figures given to the Ecclesiastical Committee on 11 March 1993.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners are currently engaged, with dioceses, on a programme of cuts in diocesan support amounting to £32 million by 1997 to bring their expenditure and income back into balance. Those cuts are not directly related to the costs of financial provision arising from the ordination of women legislation, although those costs have had an impact—relatively modest—on the scale of cuts required. The commissioners' latest estimates of those costs to be met from their income average around £3 million per annum over the period 1995–97.

Actual expenditure in 1994 and illustrative costings based on a possible total of 350 resignations are set out in the following table. These reflect the pattern of expenditure incurred to date.

Illustration of costs for 350 resignations

Year	Gross costs to be met from CC income £	Housing capital (funded by CC) £	Net costs for Church £	New housing capital (Funded by CC) £
1994	2,452,000	5,011,000	747,000	5,011,000
1995	3,439,000	4,770,000	1,872,000	4,770,000
1996	3,216,000	1,370,000	1,899,000	1,370,000
1997	2,434,000	355,000	1,226,000	54,000
1998	1,731,000	213,000	706,000	(100,000)
1999	1,250,000	111,000	433,000	(215,000)
2000	890,000	85,000	272,000	(254,000)
2001	851,000	88,000	412,000	(264,000)
2002	707,000	91,000	413,000	(274,000)
2003	625,000	85,000	437,000	(285,000)
2004	415,000	—	321,000	(396,000)
2005	289,000	—	244,000	(411,000)
2006	216,000	—	197,000	(428,000)
2007	211,000	—	204,000	(445,000)
2008	211,000	—	209,000	(463,000)
2009	217,000	—	216,000	(361,000)
2010	221,000	—	221,000	(375,000)

Illustration of costs for 350 resignations

Year	Gross costs to be met from CC income £	Housing capital (funded by CC) £	Net costs for Church £	New housing capital (Funded by CC) £
2011	226,000	—	226,000	(390,000)
2012	233,000	—	233,000	(406,000)
Total	19,834,000	12,189,000	10,488,000	6,138,000

Notes:
(a) The number of resignations shown (350)is a broad estimate, and the final costs may vary substantially.
(b) Actual costs based on 232 resignations are shown in respect of 1994. A similar pattern of costs has been assumed for future years.
(c) The figures make allowance for future increases in house prices and stipends.
(d) It has been assumed that 50 per cent. of resigners will require housing assistance.
(e) The net figures take account of such variables as stipends savings (assuming at least a temporary reduction in the payroll), allowance for retirement housing provision which would otherwise have arisen on retirement, and the possibility of some people redeeming loans or leaving rented accommodation once they have obtained alternative employment.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics, Harrogate

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will set out the level of average rate of unemployment in the Harrogate travel-to-work area for the most convenient date in the year since 1979.

Mr. Oppenhein: The information requested is available monthly from June 1983 and can be obtained, on the unadjusted basis only, from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Training

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of jobs that will be lost due to the re-defined criteria for payment to training providers of training for work programmes; and what provision will be made for trainees unable to complete their study.

Mr. Paice: I can make no estimate of the overall change in staffing amongst training providers. Individual training and enterprise councils determine both the training providers they fund and the nature of the payment arrangements to those providers. TECs have a contractual responsibility to ensure that trainees are given the opportunity to undertake suitable alternative training should a provider no longer be able to offer training for work.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many participants are transferring annually from employment training or training for work schemes to supported self employment.

Mr. Paice: In 1993–94, 5 per cent. of all training for work trainees in Great Britain were self-employed six months after leaving. No information is held centrally about how many of these people or their businesses receive some form of support.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what mechanism there is to fund new training providers wishing to replace those training managers who can no longer justify their existence under existing rules.

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils are free to fund new training providers who satisfy their requirements.

Professional Executive Services

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a list of all Employment Service offices indicating those which *(a)* will be using the services of the professional executive services team in 1995–96 and *(b)* need its services in 1994–95 and, in the case of each office, the estimate made of the number of unemployed people for whom these services would be useful.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from R. M. Phillips to Mr. John Denham, dated 13 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question asking for a list of all Employment Service (ES) offices, together with information on the Professional Executive Services Team.

The ES has over 1,350 offices throughout the country and to list them would not be practical. I have however provided details of the offices involved with the Professional and Executive Services Team which I trust you will find useful.

The Professional and Executive Services Team offers specialist advice to executive level jobseekers on jobsearch activities. It was created at a time of rising unemployment to help unemployed executives in Hampshire and Isle of Wight. It was a local initiative in response to a rise in the number of unemployed executives in the area. Under this initiative executives were offered a half-day seminar on jobsearch techniques and an opportunity to include their pen picture in an occasional brochure which was distributed to local employers.

With falling unemployment, the provision of this service has been reviewed and it will remain available during the coming operational year within the ES Portsmouth District. This District covers ES Jobcentres at Portsmouth, Newport, Ryde, Shanklin, Cosham, and Havant.

During the current operational year these services have also been available within three other ES Districts; Southampton, Fareham, Winchester and Portsmouth. These Districts cover ES Jobcentres at Andover, Basingstoke, Petersfield, Winchester, Hythe, Lymington, Southampton, Woolston, Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport.

Specialist services to unemployed executives will continue throughout the ES with Executive Jobclubs and Executive Job Search Seminar programmes.

While it is difficult to predict the future level of success of the scheme, I can advise that approximately 20 vacancies were taken by the Professional and Executive Service Team in Southampton between April 1994 and January.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobcentres

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will investigate the actions of the Employment Service in misascribing the constituency which the jobcentre in the Firth park area of Sheffield serves to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts).

(2) who is responsible for decisions in relation to the closure of the jobcentres; if it is his policy that the local Member of Parliament should be consulted or informed with regard to any changes to the availability of such a service; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will investigate the proposal to close the Firth park jobcentre facility in Sheffield and the cost involved in clients having to travel to alternative facilities.

Miss Widdecombe: I regret the error which occurred and I have asked the chief executive of the Employment Service for a full explanation. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

TREASURY

Derivatives Dealing

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what dates discussions took place between Treasury officials and Japanese officials on the incidence of off-exchange dealings in derivatives in Japan by non-Japanese nationals in the last two years.

Mr. Nelson: Japanese, United Kingdom and United States securities markets regulators met in Tokyo on 22 April 1994 in one of a series of trilateral meetings to discuss co-operation and regulatory issues in financial services. One of the issues discussed was the over-the-counter derivatives business. It was agreed to co-operate on a trilateral basis in further study.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has about the value of pensions business currently handled by United Kingdom building societies; what information he has concerning the extent to which such societies are trading in derivatives; what steps he is taking in the light of the Baring affair to issue guidance to such derivative-trading building societies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* The volume of pensions business handled by building societies is very small both in relation to the size of their operations overall, and to the total volume of pensions in the United Kingdom. Under the Building Societies Act 1986, societies may use a limited range of derivatives, but only for the reduction of risk arising from changes in interest rates, currency rates or other prescribed factors. They do not have the power to trade or speculate in derivatives. The Building Societies Commission has issued prudential guidance on the use of derivatives. The commission keeps its prudential guidance under review. If further guidance is needed in the wake of recent events at Barings, the commission will provide it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken by the Building Societies Commission to ensure that building societies do not become involved in derivatives trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* Building Societies may enter into only a restricted range of derivative contracts, solely for the purpose of reducing loss. They do not have the power to trade or speculate in derivatives.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects United Kingdom relative export unit values for manufactures to fall to the fourth quarter 1986 level; and if he will list United Kingdom relative export unit values for manufactures for each quarter since the fourth quarter of 1986.

Mr. Nelson: The latest Treasury forecast for relative export unit values for manufactures is shown in chart 3.18 of the November 1994 "Financial Statement and Budget Report", together with historical data back to 1975.

Quarterly data for relative export unit values for manufactures can be found in the "Monthly review of External Trade Statistics" published monthly by the Central Statistical Office.

Civil Servants

Mrs Maddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Nelson: Details for 1991 and 1992 are given in the civil service commissioners report for the relevant year. Copies of the reports are available in the Library. The information for 1993 and 1994 is as follows.

Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
1993	13	4	17
1994	8	5	13

Interest Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish full details of the transmission mechanism through which increases in interest rates reduce the rate of inflation.

Mr. Nelson: A change in interest rates is likely to affect the pressure of demand in the economy and hence inflation, through several different channels. It affects investment, stockbuilding and consumption directly by changing the cost of capital and the cost of borrowing. It also affects these expenditures indirectly by changing the incomes of borrowers and creditors and the value of assets, such as housing. It may also affect the inflation rate by changing the exchange rate and hence sterling

import prices. Some of these effects can be quick acting; others occur over a longer period.

Quantifying the aggregate effect is difficult. The estimates produced by the major United Kingdom macroeconomic models, including the published Treasury model, are regularly compared and published by the Economic and Social Research Council Macroeconomic Modelling Bureau at the University of Warwick. The latest comparison was published in the August 1993 "National Institute Economic Review," a copy of which is in the Library.

Bank of England

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names and tenures of the governors and deputy governors of the Bank of England over the last 30 years.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is as follows.

	Tenure
Governors	
Lord Cromer	1 July 1961 – 30 June 1966
Lord O'Brien	1 July 1966 – 30 June 1973
Lord Richardson	1 July 1973 –30 June 1983
Lord Kingsdown	1 July 1983 –30 June 1993
E A J George	1 July 1993 –
Deputy Governors	
Lord O'Brien	1 March 1964 – 30 June 1966
Sir Maurice Parsons	1 July 1966 – 28 February 1970
Sir Jasper Q Hollom	1 March 1970 – 29 February 1980
C W McMahon	1 March 1980 – 31 December 1985
Sir George Blunden	1 January 1986 – 28 February 1990
E A J George	1 March 1990 – 30 June 1993
R L Pennant-Rea	1 July 1993 –

Tourism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the balance of payments on tourism for *(a)* 1976, *(b)* 1977, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994 to-date in 1994 prices.

Mr. Nelson: The travel account balances at 1990 prices are:

Year	*Balance (million)*
1976	+3,882
1977	+4,832
1993	–2,691

Constant price estimates are routinely based on 1990 prices. Full data for 1994 are not available.

EU Membership (Economic Benefits)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list and quantify the economic benefits which will flow to the United Kingdom from membership of the European Union, together with the beneficiaries.

Mr. Nelson: I have nothing to add to the replies I gave to the hon. Member on 17 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *822*, on the 30 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *680*, and on 19 September 1994, *Official Report*, column *941*, and to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 18 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *470*, the reply my hon. Friend the Paymaster General gave on 25 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *468*, and the reply my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, gave on 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *583* in response to very similar questions from the hon. Member.

Imported Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government are opposed to an increase in the price of imported relative to home-produced goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Government are committed to permanently low inflation. We are not opposed to an increase in the price of imported goods relative to domestic goods unless this signals rising inflation.

Return on Capital

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give his assessment of *(a)* the rate of return on capital employed in manufacturing and non-manufacturing in 1993 and 1994 and *(b)* the connection between rate of return and investment in increased manufacturing capacity.

Mr. Nelson: The net real rate of return on capital employed by manufacturing companies in 1993 was 5.8 per cent. For all industrial and commercial companies—ICCs—it was 8.4 per cent. Data for 1994 are not yet available, but the forecast published last November in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" showed the net real rate of return for all ICCs rising to 10 per cent. in 1994, with some further increase in 1995. Increases in rates of return contribute to an improved climate for investment. Evidence of this is beginning to emerge. For example, manufacturing investment in plant and machinery in the fourth quarter of 1994 was $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. up on the previous quarter and $7\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. up on a year earlier.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Government have spent on the detection of tax fraud for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The costs of investigating tax offences which actually amount to fraud are not separately identifiable. However, the costs of investigations carried out by the Inland Revenue into tax evasion, which includes fraud, during the last five years, were as follows:

Year	*Spending £ million*
1989–90	89
1990–91	103
1991–92	115
1992–93	124
1993–94	137

Comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

Valuation Office

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has reached a decision on the prior options in relation to the current three-year review of the Valuation Office as a next steps agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Treasury Ministers have now considered the options for the future of the Valuation Office agency, taking into account views expressed in response to the public consultation. We have concluded that the Valuation Office should continue as a next steps agency in the public sector and within the Inland Revenue.

The next stage of the review, which it is hoped will be concluded by the end of April or very shortly thereafter, involves completing the evaluation of the agency's performance to date, reviewing the detailed framework within which the agency operates and considering the appropriate senior management structure for it.

The next stage will in particular examine the potential for involving the private sector to a greater extent in the agency's non-core work; develop proposals for securing future improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and quality in the tasks it undertakes; and consider whether trading fund status would be appropriate for the agency.

We expect to publish the results of the review in due course.

Financial Institutions

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what directions the Bank of England has given to United Kingdom financial institutions in relation to the separation of responsibilities between the front office and the settlements or back office areas of the trading units within such institutions.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The Bank of England does not issue directions to banks on how they must conduct their internal trading and settlement operations but would generally expect the functions of authorisation, execution, valuation, reconciliation, custody and recording to be handled separately.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* Sir Peter Middleton and Sir John Anson have retired as permanent secretaries from the Treasury in the five years from 1 March 1990. They have not been appointed to any public positions.

Cefn Lea Park Christian Centre

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the rateable value of the Cefn Lea Park Christian holiday centre, Dolfar, Newton in 1994–95; what it will be in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* The rateable value for this centre is £9,400 in 1994–95 and will be £27,535 for 1995–96.

The Government have introduced transitional arrangements to phase in assessments which have been increased. For properties with a new rateable value of £10,000 or more, increases in rate bills will be limited to 10 per cent. plus inflation. The same limits on increases will continue to apply for each year up to and including 1999–2000.

Ratepayers who are dissatisfied with their new assessments may appeal after the new lists come into effect on 1 April 1995.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Office of the Paymaster, *(b)* the Central Statistical Office, *(c)* the Royal Mint and *(d)* the Treasury.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* All four Departments are alert to the need to keep sickness absence to a minimum, and have introduced a range of initiatives to help improve the health of their staff and reduce sickness absence. They each have a separate dedicated welfare officer and a health and safety officer. All adopt widespread no-smoking policies, provide health screening, eye and eyesight tests for those who use display screen equipment and special leave for domestic emergencies.

In addition *(a)* the Office of the Paymaster has introduced a "look after your heart scheme", cancer screening for women, a workplace nursery and holiday play scheme arrangements; *(b)* the Central Statistical Office held health screening programmes in both 1992 and 1993, makes health promotional videos available in its Library, has organised presentations from the national physiotherapy service and provides holiday play scheme arrangements; *(c)* the Royal Mint has an on-site occupational health service, a health screening programme and access to a fitness centre; *(d)* the Treasury also has a fitness centre, provides holiday play scheme arrangements, provides awareness seminars for new VDU users and carries out workstation risk assessments for all DSU users and regular risk assessment of the workplace. In addition, contractors are asked to provide a copy of their health and safety policy statement and are briefed on best safety practice in the workplace.

All four departments have systems in place to record and monitor sickness absence; to manage staff with unacceptable levels of sickness absence; and to take appropriate action if it proves impossible to bring attendance back to acceptable levels. These systems are kept under review.

Performance-related Pay

Ms Coffey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the annual cost to the Exchequer in foregone revenue of performance-related pay schemes for the latest year for which figures are available.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* There is no tax relief for performance-related pay.

PRIME MINISTER

Executive Remuneration

Mr. Burden: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to ensure co-ordination between Ministers and regulatory bodies in monitoring levels of executive salaries and share options in privatised industries and services.

The Prime Minister: The role of regulators is to protect consumers. Regulators cannot be expected to judge the merits of individual board members, set their pay effectively and determine the appointment of boardroom executives. We await the conclusions of the Greenbury committee on the best practice for companies on executive remuneration.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Prime Minster what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the previous years.

The Prime Minister: For this purpose my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Ministerial Resignations

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide a list of those ministers who have left his Government since 1992 and give in each case the reason for their departure.

The Prime Minister: The following Ministers have resigned from the Government since the end of 1992:

The right hon. Norman Lamont MP
The right hon. Tristan Garel-Jones MP
The right hon. Sir Archie Hamilton MP
Edward Leigh MP
Sir Kenneth Carlisle MP
Robert Jackson Esq. MP
Michael Mates Esq. MP
The right hon. the Lord Hesketh
Tim Yeo MP
The right hon. the Earl of Caithness
Michael Brown MP
The right hon. the Lord Wakeham
The right hon. John MacGregor OBE, MP
The right hon. Peter Brooke CH, MP
The right hon. John Patten MP
The right hon. Sir Timothy Sainsbury MP
The right hon. Sir Wyn Roberts MP
The right hon. Sir Peter Lloyd MP
The right hon. Sir Nicholas Scott KBE MP
The right hon. Sir John Cope MP
The hon. Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd MP
Patrick McLoughlin MP
Robert Key MP
Sir Irvine Patnick OBE, MP
Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne
Viscount St. Davids
Lord Annaly
Tim Smith MP
Neil Hamilton MP
Earl of Arran
Allan Stewart MP
Charles Wardle MP
Robert G. Hughes MP

There were a number of differnt reasons for these resignations.

G7 Summit

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to respond to the letter to him of 3 March from the Secretary of the Japanese Labour Camp Survivors Association concerning its attendance at the G7 summit in July; and what his response will be.

The Prime Minister: A reply will be sent shortly. The arrangements for the G7 summit are in the hands of the Canadian authorities, who hold the chair at the moment, but there would normally be no objection to the presence in Halifax of non-governmental groups and organisations.

Animal Protection, South Korea

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise the issue of the illegal cat and dog meat industry operating in South Korea when he meets the President of Korea later this month; if he will press the President of Korea to introduce stricter animal protection laws; and what action he has taken to stop the illegal cat and dog meat industry in South Korea.

The Prime Minister: I met the President of the Republic of Korea on Wednesday 8 March. We discussed bilateral trade and investment, science and technology, and other issues of mutual interest. We did not discuss the issue of animal protection but the South Korean Government are aware of the concerns of the British public on this issue.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

International Development Association

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy, in relation to negotiations on the 11th replenishment of the International Development Association to propose that the accountability of IDA to both donor Governments and projected beneficiaries is improved, and that the 1993–94 reforms on information disclosure must be fully implemented.

Mr. Baldry: We will work with other donors during the negotiations on the 11th replenishment of IDA on the issues of strengthening IDA's accountability and implementation of its information disclosure policy.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy, in the negotiations on the 11th replenishment of IDA, to propose that *(a)* the objective of poverty reduction is fully incorporated into IDA loans, *(b)* social impact assessments are completed for all IDA projects, assessing social outcomes of loans as well as predicted adverse social impacts and *(c)* the proportion of IDA lending allocated to programmes of targeted intervention should be increased to at least 50 per cent.

Mr. Baldry: Poverty reduction is IDA's central objective, and we are ready to support measures which

will enhance IDA's effectiveness in helping borrowers to implement this objective, including expanded use of social impact assessments to improve the quality of IDA's lending. We are not persuaded, however, that global targets are an efficient way of achieving this. The composition of IDA's lending as made clear in the IDA-10 donors' report, should reflect the needs of individual countries.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy, in relation to negotiations on the 11th replenishment of IDA, to propose that *(a)* stringent procedures for evaluating the World bank's compliance with replenishment conditions should be agreed and *(b)* annual evaluations of IDA should be undertaken.

Mr. Baldry: Donors already require IDA management to report annually on progress made in implementing policy agreed under particular replenishments.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to agree to the 11th replenishment of IDA only if he believes that the funds will be used in line with the objectives set out in his overseas development programme.

Mr. Baldry: IDA's priority objectives of poverty reduction, sound economic management and environmentally sustainable development closely match those of the UK aid programme.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy, in relation to the negotiations for the 11th IDA replenishment, that there should be no use of IDA funds to pay off the multilateral debt of recipient countries.

Mr. Baldry: We and other donors support continuation of IDA's fifth dimension facility, which is financed through reflows on past IDA loans and allocates additional resources to eligible IDA recipients which are on-track with their reform programmes, in proportion to interest payments due on their International Bank for Reconstruction and Development debt. We are also ready, in the context of the 11th replenishment negotiations, to consider whether there are other ways IDA might assist those few countries which have an unsustainable burden of multilateral debt, building on the suggestions made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the annual meetings of the IMF and World bank in Madrid last October.

Indonesian Police

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *883–84*, what mechanisms he has put in place to ensure that no officers of the Indonesian police force who have been involved in activities relating to human rights abuses in Indonesia and East Timor receive scholarship awards in the United Kingdom or other training financed by his Department; and how many of those proposed as trainees by the Indonesian police force have been excluded from *(a)* scholarship awards in the United Kingdom and *(b)* other forms of training financed by his Department on these grounds in each year since 1990.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* All applicants for training under the Indonesia police project provide biographical details, have their work performance assessed, and are interviewed before selection. No officers proposed for training have been rejected on grounds of involvement in human rights abuses.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Rugby Offences

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to seek a review of the law as it relates to offences on a rugby field.

Mr. Maclean: The Law Commission is currently considering the application of the criminal law to acts of violence committed in sport, as part of its inquiry into consent as a defence to offences against the person. The Government have no plans at present to review the law in this area.

Passport Fraud

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases of false *(a)* full passports and *(b)* British visitor's passports in the past five years it has been discovered that a living person's identity has been duplicated

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The total number of fraudulent passport applications in each of the last five years was:

	Full passports	*British visitor's passports*
1990	854	210
1991	1,037	151
1992	984	126
1993	1,162	159
1994	1,031	116

Separate figures are not available for the number of those applicants who used false identifies posing as a living person.

Immigration Control

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to maintain immigration control-effectiveness at Dover.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Immigration officers apply a document check to all passengers arriving at Dover, and examine non-EEA nationals to assess their admissibility under the immigration rules.

In addition, immigration officers conduct surveillance on car and freight traffic to combat clandestine immigration by concealment in vehicles and containers. The number of clandestine entrants detected in the Dover area increased form 256 in 1993 to 379 in 1994.

Al Fayed Brothers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the reasons for refusing British nationality to *(a)* Mr. Mohammed Al-Fayed and *(b)* Mr. Ali Al-Fayed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No. It is not our practice to comment on individual applications for naturalisation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of his correspondence with the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) concerning the Al-Fayed's.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his question on 7 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *116*.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Barbara Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were determined in 1994; in how many cases *(a)* the applicant was granted asylum, *(b)* the applicant was refused and *(c)* the application was refused under paragraph 345 of the immigration rules.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on decisions taken on applications for asylum in 1994, is in the table.

Decisions[1] [2] on applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by type, 1994

Number of applicants

	[3]*1994*
Total Decisions	20,990
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum[4]	825
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	3,660
Total refused	16,500
Refused asylum and exceptional leave after full consideration	12,655
Refused on safe third country grounds[5]	865
Refused under paragraph 180F of Immigration Rules[6]	2,985

[1] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period.

[2] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

[3] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.

[4] Excluding South East Asian refugees.

[5] Refusals under para 345 of the Immigration Rules since 1 October 1994.

[6] Para 340 refusals since 1 October 1994. For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to invitation to interview to establish identity.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been removed to France on safe third country grounds since 26 July 1993; and how many of those so removed have been returned to the United Kingdom by the French authorities.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Available records show that 153 asylum seeker have been removed to France on safe third country grounds since 26 July 1993. Of these, 80 have been returned to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by country of origin of current applicants for asylum, of the duration of their application, the time spent in detention and the proposed action, if any, by his Department.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information on the number of applications for asylum awaiting an initial decision as at 31 December 1994, by nationality, is given in the table. Information on the length of time these applicants have been waiting for an initial decision is not available.

As at 30 January 1995, 139 persons who were awaiting an initial decision on their application for asylum were detained.

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The number of asylum applications outstanding, excluding dependants, as at 31 December 1994, by nationality

Nationality	*Applications outstanding*
Europe including Americas	
Bulgaria	550
Colombia	590
Romania	805
Turkey	3,545
Former USSR	1,155
Former Yugoslavia	5,990
Others	1,630
Total	14,265
Africa	
Angola	1,815
Benin	50
Cameroon	175
Ethiopia	1,345
Ghana	5,435
Kenya	2,090
Nigeria	5,100
Somalia	1,025
Sudan	510
Togo/Ivory Coast	1,300
Uganda	1,275
Zaire	3,570
Others[1]	3,570
Total	27,270
Middle East	
Iran	805
Iraq	575
Lebanon	475

The number of asylum applications outstanding, excluding dependants, as at 31 December 1994, by nationality

Nationality	*Applications outstanding*
Others	945
Total	2,805
Asia	
China	860
India	2,630
Pakistan	2,760
Sri Lanka	3,185
Others	1,405
Total	10,840
Nationality Unknown	80
Grand Total	55,255

[1] includes Sierra Leone

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown by nationality of the number of asylum seekers removed from the United Kingdom on safe third country grounds in 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on the number of removals of asylum seekers whose applications were refused on safe third country grounds, by nationality, for 1994 is given in the table.

Information on the destination of asylum applicants refused and removed on safe third country grounds, and the number of those who were returned by the country removed to, could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Number[1] of asylum seekers whose applications were refused on safe third country grounds and who were removed, excluding dependants, by nationality, 1994.

	Refusals
Europe	
Albania	3
Bulgaria	6
Czechoslovakia	11
Poland	6
Romania	11
Turkey	18
Former USSR	6
Former Yugoslavia	16
Total	77
Americas	
Colombia	1
Other Americas	2
Total	3
Africa	
Algeria	27
Angola	13
Ethiopia	9
Ghana	21
Ivory Coast	10
Kenya	2
Liberia	8
Morocco	1
Niger	1
Nigeria	15
Sierra Leone	12
Somalia	14
South Africa	5
Sudan	4
Tanzania	2
Uganda	5
Zaire	4
Other Africa	2
Total	155
Middle East	
Iran	3
Iraq	7
Lebanon	6
Total	16
Asia	
Afghanistan	3
Bangladesh	3
China	6
India	6
Pakistan	7
Sri Lanka	24
Total	49
Other and nationality not known	6
Grand Total	306

[1] Provisional information pending the analysis of late data.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if those seeking asylum in Britain are entitled to legal aid in order to apply for *(a)* a writ of habeas corpus and *(b)* a judicial review.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply. Civil legal aid is available for both of these proceedings, subject to the statutory means and merits tests.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who are seeking asylum in the United Kingdom have been detained in the past 12 months, in *(a)* Campsfield, *(b)* Haslar holding centre, *(c)* Rochester and *(d)* Rickmansworth.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Welsh Police

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were employed full-time by Welsh police forces in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The total number of officers in Welsh forces is set out in the table. The available information does not distinguish officers employed on a full-time basis.

Year As at 31 December	*Number of officers*
1990	6,399
1991	6,424
1992	6,480
1993	6,438
1994	6,373

Drugs (Deaths)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of recorded deaths from *(a)* methadone and *(b)* heroin overdose for each coroner's area of the United Kingdom last year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not collected centrally. In 1992, the latest year for which information is available, 76 notified drug addicts in the United Kingdom died because of an overdose of methadone, and 129 addicts died because of an overdose of heroin, morphine or other unspecified opiate drugs.

Data Processing Contract

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what were regarded as the relative *(a)* advantages and *(b)* disadvantages of (i) the ED5 in-house team bid and (ii) the Sema bid for the data processing contract in his Department; and on what basis he made his decision;

(2) if he will list the senior managers within his Department who were responsible for data processing work prior to the recent privatisation; and if he will indicate what has happened to them, in career terms, since the award of the contract to Sema;

(3) if his Department has paid towards the cost of redundancies of employees working on data processing at Corby who are likely to be re-employed in similar work at the site; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will make a statement about how the bids from *(a)* the ED5 in-house team and *(b)* Sema for the data processing contract were evaluated; what assumptions were made about each bid including assumptions about aspects not directly contained in the bids; if the cost of the redundancies to be paid for by his Department was added to the Sema bid; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if the evaluation process for the data processing contract covered all the services that were being undertaken on this work within his Department; and what adjustments were made in considering and comparing the bids for *(a)* the ED5 in-house team and *(b)* Sema to ensure an accurate comparison;

(6) what was the period of time between the submission to this Department of best and final offers for the data processing contract and the announcement of the decision; and what factors underlay the length of time of this interval.

Mr. Howard: In the market test of the Home Office administrative information technology services division—ED5—the final competition was between Sema Group plc and an in-house team, in association with a private sector partner. Other bidders had been eliminated at earlier stages of the market test. Following detailed negotiations with Sema Group plc and the in-house team, both submitted "best and final offer" bids which were received on 9 June 1994. Both these bidders were considered technically capable of providing the required services and their bids were compared on the basis of a final evaluation which showed that the Sema bid represented better value for money offering estimated annual savings of about £4.8 million.

The evaluation was undertaken on the basis of information put forward by the bidders in submitting their best and final offers. The evaluation covered all the services in the contract; other information technology supplies and services provided to the Home Office which are outside the scope of the contract are purchased separately.

In evaluating the offers, a number of adjustments were made to both bids to ensure that the total costs to the Home Office were being compared. The replies given to the hon. Member on 13 February, *Official Report*, columns *491-92*, explained that details of bids and related evaluation arrangements are commercially confidential but the maximum potential costs to the Home Office of the transitional and restructuring costs in the Sema Group bid were used in the evaluation.

It took 40 days to evaluate the bids, including consideration by Ministers and officials, and arrange the announcement which was made on 19 July 1994.

The reply given to the hon. Member on 23 January at column *50* explained that with some limited exceptions staff in the undertaking were transferred to the Sema group. Subsequent redundancies are a matter for Sema plc who will meet the associated costs. Those staff in the undertaking who were redeployed before the transfer were found posts in the same grade elsewhere in the Department or in other Government Departments.

Prisoners (Mental Illness)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements generally obtain in respect of prisoners for the treatment of a prisoner for mental illness who lived in one district health authority but is imprisoned in a prison covered by another district health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 13 March 1995.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about arrangements for the treatment for mental illness of prisoners who are detained in establishments away from their usual districts of residence.

The general rule under which the Prison Service has operated for many years is that it meets the costs of a prisoner's health care inside prison walls itself. That would include any treatment for mental illness. If a prisoner needs to be taken to an outside hospital for treatment for mental illness, the decision as to which hospital he/she is referred to is one for the clinicians involved in his/her care. The costs of treatment are a matter for his/her usual district of residence, except where the transfer to one of the special hospitals is concerned, as they are funded centrally by the Department of Health.

Guidance issued by the NHS Management Executive states that the health authority responsible for funding the treatment of a prisoner/patient is determined by the address at which he or she was resident immediately before detention. Where that cannot be determined satisfactorily, responsibility falls on the district in which the offence, or alleged offence, in respect of which the prisoner is detained was committed.

Crime Victims Hotline

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many calls the telephone hotline for crime victims has received; how many of those calls have led to action being taken; and if he will specify the action.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 February 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 13 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the Victim Helpline.

Up to 8 March this year, the Helpline had received 86 calls since its inception on 5 December 1994. The work of the Helpline is confidential and it is not possible to give details of individual calls. Of the 86 calls, sixty have been passed to prison governors for any necessary further action, such as the investigation of alleged unwanted contact from a prisoner. A further 26 calls were asking for advice on how the helpline operated.

Parole

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners in the last year for which figures are available experienced a delay in their parole; what was *(a)* the average delay and, *(b)* the delay for each prisoner; and what has been (i) the total cost to public funds of these delays and, (ii) the cost for each prisoner;

(2) how many prisoners are currently experiencing a delay in their parole; and what is the cost to public funds of keeping those people in prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The Parole Board and parole unit are currently dealing with 569 cases involving prisoners where decisions on parole have been delayed beyond parole eligibility date or its anniversary. It is not possible to estimate the cost to public funds until these cases have been dealt with, and it is clear *(a)* in which cases parole will be granted, and *(b)* how long after the parole eligibility date a decision is notified to the prisoner.

I regret that the information requested in relation to delays in parole during a complete year is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chechnya

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Russian Government concerning the war in Chechnya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns with the Russian Prime Minister in London on 2 March.

My right hon. Friend told him that Chechnya had been a setback to Russia's relations with the west, stressed the importance of ending the fighting and reaching a negotiated settlement and urged the Russians to guarantee free access for humanitarian aid.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the cost to the Russian Government of the campaign in Chechnya; what assessment he has made of the estimate of the economist Andrei Illarionov; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is very difficult to make an accurate estimate of the costs of the Chechnya campaign.

We are aware of Illarionov's estimate of $5 billion. It is one of a number of widely varying estimates and is based on extrapolation from a limited amount of data.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the Russian Defence Minister General Pavel Grachev's call for a new offensive in Chechnya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We continue to urge the Russians to end the fighting in Chechnya and pursue a negotiated settlement. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made these points most recently when he saw the Russian Prime Minister on 2 March.

St. Helena

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of discrimination on wage rates for employment in Government services on St. Helena between ex-patriates from the United Kingdom and St. Helenians; in what instances in the last 10 years different wage rates were paid to each category of person for the same work; what were the wage rates; and if he will put in the Library documents which are used in the application of such a policy in St. Helena.

Mr. David Davis: There is no such policy. Pay scales offered by the Government of St. Helena to its employees do not discriminate between those recruited in the United Kingdom and St. Helenians recruited locally. An expatriate may be paid a supplement by us in addition to the local salary to bring him or her into line with UK salary levels if he or she is recruited as part of the UK's aid effort at the request of the St. Helena Government in order to fill a post for which no suitably qualified St. Helenian is available.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many St. Helenian males leave their families on St. Helena to work for over one year elsewhere.

Mr. David Davis: The total number of unaccompanied St. Helenian males working away from St. Helena on contracts of more than 12 months is 90, the vast majority being on Ascension island.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of censorship of radio stations in St. Helena; and if he will place the documentation which sets out that policy in the Library.

Mr. David Davis: There is no censorship of Radio St. Helena, which is the only radio station on the island.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government censorship policy applies to St. Helena Television.

Mr. David Davis: There is no policy of censorship of television on St. Helena. A television station will soon start and will operate under licence by Cable and Wireless. The company is required under the terms of the licence to notify the Governor of details of the services to be offered. The licence controls the broadcast of obscene or seditious material or material that would endanger security or public morals.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many St.

Helenian mothers leave their families on St. Helena to work for over one year elsewhere.

Mr. David Davis: The total number of unaccompanied St. Helenian mothers working away from St. Helena on contracts of more than 12 months is 22.

Chelsea Fans, Bruges

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens were deported from Belgium as a result of the Bruges versus Chelsea football match; how many were arrested; how many have been charged; and how many have been or are likely to be prosecuted.

Mr. David Davis: Approximately 1,000 Chelsea fans, either without tickets or with forged tickets or with invalid tickets for the Bruges fans area of the stadium were deported from Belgium as a result of the Bruges v. Chelsea football match. Forty-two fans were detained for disorderly behaviour and one fan was arrested and charged with assault. None were prosecuted and all were released within 24 hours.

Middle East

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with other permanent members of the UN Security Council on ways of resuscitating the middle east peace process; and what were the conclusions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During the debate in the UN Security Council on 28 February on Israeli settlement building in the occupied territories, we reiterated our continued support for the peace process and our condemnation of settlement building. Separately, on behalf of the EU, the French Foreign Minister wrote to the United States Secretary of State about the Troika's recent visit to theregion in support of the peace process.

Iraq

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support or co-operation the Iraqi-British interests group delegation to Iraq had from his Department.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iraqi-British interest group neither requested nor received assistance from my Department for its visit to Iraq. However, at least one member of the group called, in a personal capacity, on our embassy in Jordan after the visit, and the normal courtesies were extended.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on levels of military activity in Iraq between Government forces and various rebel groups.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of reports of clashes that have taken place between Iraqi Government forces and opposition groups over the past few days, mainly in the areas of Kirkuk and Irbil. It is difficult to assess the level of activity. Fighting appears to have broken out following the Iraqi opposition reports of Iraqi troop movements and shelling of Kurdish villages. We are continuing to monitor the situation closely.

Burma

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries which are known to him as supplying arms to Burma.

Mr. Goodlad: Together with our EU partners we imposed an arms embargo on Burma in July 1991. That remains in force.

We have no reliable information about the sale of arms to Burma by other countries.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made regarding attacks by the Burmese forces on the Karen people.

Mr. Goodlad: Together with our EU partners we have expressed our concerns about recent developments directly to the ruling military regime in Burma, the State Law and Order Restoration Council—SLORC. We called in the Burmese ambassador on 17 February to reinforce the EU action and to urge the SLORC to call an immediate halt to the current offensive. On 10 March the EU issued a statement condemning the attacks and calling upon the SLORC to find a swift and peaceful solution to the ethnic minority problem in Burma.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from other Governments critical of British attempts to stimulate trade links with the SLORC regime in Burma.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to send military and police observers to assist the UNAVEM III peacekeeping operation in Angola.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no plans to contribute military or police observers to UNAVEM III. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement told the House on 23 February, we have agreed in principle to a United Nations request to provide a logistics battalion to the peacekeeping operation in Angola.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific international initiatives are being taken to try to stabilise the internal security position in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Baldry: We are working to bring greater international attention to the conflict; in particular with the UN and Commonwealth. We are in close touch with EU and African partners. Last month the UN and commonwealth secretaries-general sent their special representatives to Sierra Leone to examine ways of bringing about a settlement.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what timetable has been drawn up by the Government of Sierra Leone for the return of the country to democratic rule.

Mr. Baldry: The existing timetable of the Government of Sierra Leone provides for parliamentary elections before the end of 1995. Although the internal security situation may lead to some delay, we expect the Government to press ahead with the transition to civilian rule as rapidly as practicable.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government of Sierra Leone has sought from the international community to deal with its internal disorder.

Mr. Baldry: In response to requests from the Government of Sierra Leone, the UN and commonwealth secretaries-general have sent special representatives to Freetown to explore ways of bringing about a settlement. We have given our strong support to these initiatives.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what improvements are planned to assist in the identification of parliamentary questions and answers.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: A new method of identifying written parliamentary questions by attaching a unique number to each question has been developed by the House authorities, in conjunction with Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

With the wider use of questions in electronic form and the need to relate the electronic version to the printed page, the Committee has agreed that an identifying number should in future be shown beside each question when it appears on the Notice Paper and the Order Paper. As questions with an identifying number begin to be answered, the number will also start to appear in the *Official Report*.

The number will not exceed five digits, and the sequence of numbers will begin afresh at the beginning of each parliamentary Session. The number will not be used to "count" individual Members' questions, but will simply reflect the current total of questions tabled in the House.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage by how much the money disbursed by the Football Trust has been reduced since the introduction of the national lottery.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Details of the weekly revenue made available to the Football Trust for distribution in the current financial year were given in response to a written question from the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on 2 February, *Official Report* column *778*. The national lottery was introduced on 14 November 1994. A table detailing the trust's revenue since the start of 1995 is as follows.

			Football Trust Income
Week ending	*Reduction in pool betting duty (£)*	*Spot the Ball (£)*	*Total (£)*
7 January 1995	393,654	189,906	583,560
14 January 1995	404,662	205,343	610,005
21 January 1995	408,250	206,575	614,825
28 January 1995	408,357	197,103	605,460
4 February 1995	401,609	204,514	606,123
11 February 1995	398,305	200,988	599,293
18 February 1995	398,545	195,498	594,043

Performance Targets

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his oral answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *680*, if he will publish the performance targets for the key areas in which services are delivered by his Department together with the results that have been achieved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* Details of the achievement of key performance targets by my Department appear in our annual report, which was published on 9 March, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. My Department's agencies and sponsored bodies produce their own reports.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Horam: The cost to my Departments of water and sewerage in the current year to date and in each of the three previous years is as follows:

	Cabinet Office £	*COI £*	*HMSO £*
1991–92	62,069	52,623	70,762
1992–93	73,952	32,106	111,602
1993–94	66,766	3,128[2]	98,266
1994–95[1]	98,798	n/a	102,290

[1] This is a part-year figure as not all invoices to the end of the year have yet been submitted.
[2] The charging regime changed from rateable value to metered supply costs in 1993–94.

Civil Service

Mr. Trend: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about changes in the arrangements for recruitment to the civil service.

Mr. Horam: The Command Paper "The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change (CM 2748)" indicated the Government's intention to reinforce the principle of selection on merit and to enhance the role of the independent civil service commissioners. The approval of the Privy Council is currently being sought to a revised civil service Order in Council to give effect to these new recruitment arrangements. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

From 1 May 1995 the civil service commissioners will be responsible for interpreting the fundamental principle

of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition for all civil service recruitment, including the circumstances in which exceptions to the principle can be made within the parameters of the Order in Council; publishing a simple, but binding, recruitment code; auditing departments' and agencies' systems for compliance with their recruitment code and publishing on account of their audit in their annual report. They will continue to approve appointments from outside the civil service to the new senior civil service, but not to appointments immediately below that level and to the fast stream entries. Such appointments, like all other recruitment, will be subject to the commissioners' new recruitment code.

Departments and agencies will be required to publish information about their recruitment systems and their use of the permitted exceptions to fair and open competition. This will make information available publicly about recruitment to the civil service and the extent to which exceptions to the recruitment principle are made, apart from very short-term appointments.

Making these changes now does not, of course, prejudice the commitment in the Command Paper to consider legislation on the civil service to put the powers of the civil service commissioners and the Minister for the Civil Service on a statutory basis at a later date.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency, *(b)* the Civil Service Occupational Health Service, *(c)* Chessington Computer Centre and *(d)* the Central Office of Information

Mr. David Hunt: Management of sickness absence at next steps agencies is the responsibility of chief executives. I have therefore referred the hon. Member's question to the chief executives of the four agencies concerned, who will be writing to him separately.

Letter from Thea Harvey to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 9 March 1995:

Michael Geddes has asked me to reply to your PQ on sickness absence.

The Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency formally monitors the sickness absence level of its staff on a monthly basis.

However, the initial responsibility lies with line managers who are required to meet informally with staff when the attendance level is unsatisfactory.

If there is no improvement, formal procedures begin which, ultimately, would end with dismissal as a result of irregular attendance.

Letter from E. C. McCloy to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 8 March 1995:

Your question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on measures taken to combat sickness absence in the Civil Service Occupational Health Service has been referred to me to reply directly.

Hitherto, line managers initiated investigations on receipt of sickness absence records triggered from central records at Chessington at 14 days in 1 year for those under 45 years and 21 days in 1 year for those over 45 years.

Over the last year a small number of staff developed serious medical conditions which resulted in unavoidable long periods of absence. In a small agency, 120 full time staff, the effect of a few individuals with long term absence on the overall percentage sickness absence can be misleading. In 1993, 75 staff had no recorded sickness absence. The corresponding figure for 1994 was 92.

The apparent rise in percentage absence has led us to review our management procedures. Line managers will, in future, initiate informal review of absence after 7 days of self certificated absence or 14 days of certificated or combined certificated/self certificated absence in any one year.

Where such action fails to resolve the situation, discussion with senior managers will result, where appropriate, in a request for an assessment by an occupational physician independent of line managers. Where absence continues thereafter at and unacceptable rate formal procedures for inefficiency will be instigated in accordance with OHSA policy.

Letter from R. N. Edwards to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 2 March 1995:

I refer to your enquiry of 1 March to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster regarding the measures being taken to combat sickness absenteeism at Chessington Computer Centre.

The Centre's procedures for the monitoring and control of sick absence were reviewed during 1994. As a result, new guidance notes for line managers were issued in September 1994 formally introducing new procedures. The changes in procedure introduced were intended to emphasise the line manager's role in the control of absence. Return to work interviews have been formally introduced, and warning letters to staff, whose absence levels exceed that normally expected, are to be issued by line managers rather than by personnel managers.

These steps have been taken in addition to the measures already in place which include the provision of a welfare service for staff, and the use of the Occupational Health Service for advice on medical and health care issues.

Absence levels across the centre are monitored on a monthly basis and measured against set targets. Over the last year there has been a downward trend in overall absence rates. Progress towards targets will continue to be observed closely and procedures reviewed and revised as necessary.

Letter from Mike Devereau to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 6 March 1995:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to respond to your PQ about managing sickness absenteeism.

You are already aware, from my 26 January letter to you, of our figures over recent years. When compared against other organisations, our absence record might be regarded as not being a case of especially serious concern. However, I am by no means complacent and I do, of course, fully recognise that any reduction in sickness levels can contribute directly to our successful year-on-year achievement of efficiency gains.

We have recently carried out an internal pilot study, which has been a valuable overall indicator, but now recognise that more analytical work needs to be carried out if we are to achieve meaningful benchmark comparisons. We believe that we need to build up a more complete picture of absences analysed by grade; by age range; by sex; staff with no absences; distribution of illness by length of absence; types of illness, and comparison across various work areas. This further analysis is in hand.

We are also awaiting report of a Health Screening exercise, in which —on a voluntary basis—a high percentage of staff recently underwent physical and lifestyle checks. This screening was carried out for us by an independent external organisation, and we have asked that they report back to us on their overall findings—including details of health profiles, smoking and drinking patterns, and any observations they can provide on matters such as stress levels.

Health screening is one of a number of initiatives taken by COI in recent years to improve health standards. Other initiatives have

been the introduction of 'no smoking' policies; provision of a small fitness centre; eyesight testing for VDU users; and training in safe manual handling procedures.

Depending on the further analysis work referred to above, it is likely that our action plan will encompass:

(i) setting up better monitoring systems;

(ii) carrying out regular benchmarking against 'best practice' organisations;

(iii) providing more detailed guidance to line managers, so as to encourage them to take even greater personal responsibility for controlling absences;

(iv) if appropriate, provide training for line managers in the management of sickness absence;

(v) providing more counselling to staff with comparatively poor sickness records, and developing our system so that—even after a single day's absence—staff are formally interviewed by the manager to welcome them back and discuss the nature of the illness.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Register of County Court Judgments

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will amend the Register of County Court Judgments Regulations so as to exempt hon. Members carrying out their public duties from having to pay for searches of county court judgments.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are no plans to change the requirement to pay a fee for searches of the register of county court judgments.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what date his Department transferred its responsibility for logging county court judgments to Registry Trust Ltd.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Although the Lord Chancellor retains statutory responsibility for the register of county court judgments, responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the register was passed to Registry Trust Ltd. on 30 December 1985.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what way payments for search requests on county court judgments by hon. Members carrying out their public duties have changed since the Lord Chancellor's departmental responsibility for these matters was transferred to Registry Trust Ltd.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No changes have been made to the requirement to pay a fee for searches of the register of county court judgments since Registry Trust Ltd. assumed responsibility for the operation of the register.

Civil Enforcement

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the report on the future of civil enforcement, which was lodged with him in early 1994.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor undertook a public consultation in 1992 on whether the law in this area should be changed. He is currently considering the outcome of that consultation.

Court Summonses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to ensure that court summonses in the county court are served by first class post; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor recently conducted a public consultation exercise on the policy of serving summonses by first class post. The responses to this consultation are currently being evaluated.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration his Department is giving to the use of an encryption key which would allow the state access to all information on the Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Internet is an open and unrestricted environment for information exchange, in which encryption is currently little used. The Government, along with other member states, are currently discussing the future use of encryption in such networks, taking account of both commercial needs and the interests of security and public order.

Italian Car Taxation

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the European Commission concerning the Italian Government's proposals to reintroduce the imposta straordinaria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are very concerned about the difficulties which Italian car taxation has been causing exporters to Italy of luxury cars. This problem has been raised at regular meetings of the Internal Market Advisory Committee, which is chaired by the European Commission. In addition, I wrote to the Italian Finance Minister last month, urging the Italians not to reintroduce the imposta straordinaria, which we understood was then under consideration. We were pleased to learn that the Italian Government subsequently published their budget without including this tax.

BSkyB

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Office of Fair Trading's decisions on 7 March relating to the packaging and pricing of BSkyB programming to cable operators.

Mr. Jonathon Evans: I welcome the success of the Director General of Fair Trading in securing undertakings from BSkyB which meet his concerns.

Exports to Gibraltar

Mr. Bennett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the export licence application refused for the export of goods to Gibraltar in 1993 was for equipment specified as ML3 in group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to SI 1992 No. 3092.

Mr. Ian Taylor: No. The equipment in question was specified as ML15.

It has not been the practice of successive Governments to reveal details of licences or applications unless the requirements of confidentiality are outweighed by the public interest.

Petrol Pumps

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to continue the requirement for petrol pumps to be checked by trading standards officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Trading standards officers have the power to test petrol pumps, as items of weighing or measuring equipment in use for trade. TSOs test petrol pumps before first use and from time to time during use; the frequency of this subsequent testing will depend on the local situation.

Plans have already been announced—in the booklet "Deregulation—Cutting Red Tape", January 1994—for a scheme to allow manufacturers to self-verify their own production if they so choose. This would not affect the in-use testing by TSOs.

Plantsbrook Group plc

Mr. David Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report into the Service Corporation International plc Great Southern/Plantsbrook acquisition will be published.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission is due to report on the acquisition of Plantsbrook Group plc by Service Corporation International on 24 March. The Department aims to publish MMC merger reports within 20 working days of receipt.

Voluntary Agreements

Mr. David Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers he or the Director General of Fair Trading have to review voluntary agreements entered into to avoid references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading has a continuing responsibility to keep commercial activity under review. That can extend to voluntary agreements or undertakings and the degree of compliance with them. Where he considers it appropriate, the director general can make a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Gas Consumers Council

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the reduction in the Gas Consumers Council's budget for 1994–95; and what assessment he has made of the impact of these cuts on the staffing of the council.

Mr. Eggar: The Gas Consumers Council grant-in-aid for 1994–95 is £2,711,000, a reduction of £209,000 on the previous year. it is for the council to decide how best to use its resources, including staffing levels, to carry out its duties.

Gas Bill

Mr. Nigel Griffiths : To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide additional resources to *(a)* the Office of Fair Trading, *(b)* the Office of Gas Supply, and *(c)* the Gas Consumers Council to reflect their increased work load as a consequence of additional responsibilities contained in the Gas Bill.

Mr. Eggar: I do not believe that the Gas Bill will add materially to the responsibilities of the Office of Fair Trading and the Gas Consumers Council. The number of Ofgas staff will rise by about 50 when the Director General of Gas Supply takes over the DTI's functions for gas metering as envisaged under the Gas Bill. In addition, some 10 to 20 posts plus consultancy support may be needed at Ofgas to manage the transition to a competitive market, although this should fall once a fully competitive market is established.

Newspapers

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will consider the increased carriage charges faced by retail newsagents from monopoly supplying wholesalers;

(2) what representations he has received about the examination by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission of the newspaper industry in respect of carriage charges.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answers 9 March 1995]:* The National Federation of Retail Newsagents has raised this matter in correspondence, as has Lekkerland UK.

The MMC report on the supply of newspapers in England and Wales gave no adverse public interest finding in respect of carriage charges, and no power arose to act on them.

However, a reference to carriage charges was included in the voluntary code of practice to govern the supply of national newspapers agreed with the industry following publication of the MMC report., This reference ensures that such charges are not used as a means of circumventing the prohibition on refusal to supply, by making supply economically unattractive to new applicants.

If new retailers feel that their carriage charges are incorrect, they should take the matter up in the first instance with the wholesaler. If this does not resolve the dispute the retailer should make use of the arbitration procedure set out in the code of practice.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will reconsider the matter of carriage charges in the newspaper trade following the recent increases.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission's 1993 report on the supply of newspapers in England and Wales included no adverse public interest findings in respect of carriage charges, and therefore no power arose to act on them.

However, a reference to carriage charges was included in the voluntary code of practice to govern the supply of national newspapers, agreed with the industry following publication of the MMC report. This ensures that such charges are not used as a means of circumventing the prohibition on refusal to supply by making supply economically unattractive to new applicants. If new retailers feel that their carriage charges are incorrect, they should take the matter up in the first instance with the

wholesaler. If this does not resolve the dispute, the retailer should make use of the arbitration process set out in the code of practice.

Electricity Bills

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the percentage of unpaid electricity bills last year overall and in each of the electricity company areas.

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Gas Bills

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the percentage of unpaid gas bills last year overall and in each of the gas company areas.

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Rom-Data

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the circumstances that led to Rom-Data in Cornwall receiving a grant; and what steps he is taking to recover the money.

Mr. Page *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* My officials lodged an invoice with the liquidator of Rom-Data in January seeking recovery of the grant paid to the company. Otherwise, I have nothing to add at present to the answers given to earlier questions from the hon. Member.

Companies House

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the full cost of the consultancy work carried out by SRU/MMD Ltd. on the privatisation review of Companies House since it was appointed in October 1992 until he made his announcement on the future of Companies House on 20 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *1046.*

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The cost of the consultancy work was £283,000 excluding VAT. I have already written to the hon. Member correcting my earlier answer on this subject and a copy of that letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Northern Electric

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contact Sir Charles Powell had between 1984 and 1991 with civil servants in connection with the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric; with whom he was in contact; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* None.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contact or communication Ministers or officials in his Department had with Sir Charles Powell as non-executive director of Trafalgar House, in connection with *(a)* the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric and *(b)* the subsequent decision not to refer the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* At a meeting on 1 December 1994, Sir Charles Powell advised my right hon. Friend for Energy and Industry of the possibility of Trafalgar House making a bid for Northern Electric and asked whether the Government had any plans for early redemption of the special shares in regional electricity companies.

On 15 December, my right hon. Friend confirmed that the Government would retain their special shares in the RECs until 31 March 1995 and that they would not be redeemed early. In his role as Minister with responsibility for the energy industry, my hon. Friend met Mr. David Morris, chairman of Northern Electric, on 19 January 1995 and Sir Charles Powell, on behalf of Trafalgar House, on 23 January.

At both meetings, and in accordance with our usual procedures, my right hon. Friend made it clear that he could listen only to the companies' views about the bid and could not discuss the bid itself. In addition to these meetings, a number of letters were received from Sir Charles and others on behalf of Trafalgar House, and from Northern Electric and others on behalf of Northern Electric.

Sir Charles also made a number of telephone calls to officials in the office of my right hon. Friend about procedural matters relating to the bid. The content of these calls was not referred to Ministers. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was not involved in any of these contacts between Sir Charles and the Department.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions or communications Mrs. Annabel Keswick, political adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had with Ministers and civil servants in the Department of Trade and Industry in respect of the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* None.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what account was taken of the recommendations of the Foreign Affairs Committee on its third Session report of Session 1993–94, HC 271, on the Pergau dam relating to Trafalgar House in evaluating that company's bid for Northern Electric;

(2) what evaluation he made of the relationship between Trafalgar House and Jadine Matheson when deciding not to refer the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* In making his decision not to refer the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade took account of all relevant factors. His decision was in accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading.

Coach Companies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will refer the activities of *(a)* Stagecoach and *(b)* Badgerline to the Office of Fair Trading on the grounds of predatory pricing.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading will consider any complaints of anti-competitive behaviour which the hon. Member puts to him.

Arms Sales (Burma)

Mr. Miller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the value of British arms sold to Burma since 1990.

Mr. Ian Taylor: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it has been the policy of successive United Kingdom Governments not to disclose details of defence trade with individual countries.

"Energy Paper 65"

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assumptions he has made in "Energy Paper 65" concerning the amount of coal likely to be burnt in English and Welsh power stations in the year 2000; and what was provided by RJB Mining to prospective investors as likely to be sold to English and Welsh power stations in 2000.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The amount of coal burnt in power stations is not an assumption, but rather a result of the modelling process described in "Energy Paper 65" paragraph 2.26. Estimates of the coal tonnage burnt in 2000 in English and Welsh coal power stations vary between 23 to 38 million tonnes. I understand RJB Mining plc prospectus contains its estimates.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what levels of gross domestic product growth are assumed in the central forecasts to 2000 in "Energy Paper 65"; and how this figure compares with current Treasury forecasts.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* In the central GDP growth scenarios in "Energy Paper 65", gross domestic product is assumed to grow by an average rate of approximately 3.1 per cent. per annum between 1994 and 2000. This compares with a current Treasury assumption of an average GDP growth rate of about 3.2 per cent. per annum over the same period.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evaluation his Department has made of the discrepancies between the central forecasts for United Kingdom carbon emissions in 2000 made in "Energy Paper 65" and those published by DRI/McGraw Hill on 13 February.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The detailed assumptions which underlie DRI's forecast for the UK have not been made public.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what independent peer review process he has undertaken before publishing "Energy Paper 65".

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* In the course of developing the models used for the projections in "Energy Paper 65", discussions took place with various experts in the energy modelling field. In addition the following two papers have been published which discuss the research then in progress:

Hodgson, Derek and Miller, Keith (1995) "Modelling UK energy demand", in Barker, T., Ekins, P. and Johnstone, N. (eds) "Global Warming and Energy Demand", London: Routledge.

Miller, Keith (1993) "The DTI Energy Model", in Hawdon, D. (ed) "Recent Studies of the Demand for Energy in the UK", Guildford: Surrey Energy Economics discussion paper series.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assumptions have been made regarding the contribution of combined cycle gas turbines to the generation mix in 2000 in "Energy Paper 65"; and what proportion is assumed to be operating at baseload.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* It is estimated that between 16 and 18 GW of CCGT capacity will be in place in 2000. In most of the scenarios all the CCGT capacity runs on baseload. The details of electricity supply industry capacity are given in annexe C.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has included within "Energy Paper 65" any carbon emissions from energy extraction processes within the North sea.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The treatment of offshore emissions in "Energy Paper 65" is consistent with the national atmospheric emissions inventory and takes into account offshore carbon dioxide emissions from gas flaring and from fuel used for production.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made in "Energy Paper 65" of the likely carbon savings which the Energy Saving Trust will achieve in 2000.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* In "Energy Paper 65", 1.6 million tonnes of carbon are assumed to be saved by the Energy Saving Trust in 2000.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made in "Energy Paper 65" of the likely carbon savings which will occur by 2000 within industry; and if he will provide a breakdown of the contribution that will be made by each relevant Government initiative.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* By 2000, it is estimated that savings of between 2 million and 2.5 million tonnes of carbon will be made within the business sector, which comprises industry and commerce. "Energy Paper 65" estimates show that the energy saved is likely to be less carbon-intensive than was assumed in the original climate change programme. The carbon savings comprise emissions saved directly in the business sector through lower consumption of fossil fuels and indirectly in the electricity supply industry through lower electricity demand from businesses.

"Energy Paper 65" does not separately distinguish all the individual Government initiatives in the business sector.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what independent research he has commissioned to assist him in the preparation of "Energy Paper 65".

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The development by the science policy research unit of a boiler and combined heat and power model was part funded with the private sector. This model has been run by DTI as part of the "Energy Paper 65" exercise. In addition, both DTI and DOE have various on-going research programmes with the Building Research Establishment and energy technology support unit.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assumptions he has made in "Energy Paper 65" concerning the likely output of Magnox power stations in 2000.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The Magnox stations owned by Nuclear Electric and British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. are assumed to be producing around 20 TWh in 2000.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what implications for local environment air quality he envisages as a consequence of the increased diesel car usage in 2000 forecast in "Energy Paper 65".

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* "Energy Paper 65" does not assess local air quality, but a recently published report by the energy technology support unit—"UK Petrol and Diesel Demand: Energy and Emissions Effects of a Switch to Diesel"—commissioned by the Departments of Transport and Trade and Industry, projected significant overall reductions in both national and urban emissions of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, oxides of nitrogen and particulates from vehicle exhausts by the year 2000, compared with 1990. These projections took into account the expected improvements from tighter emission standards already agreed, as well as projections of traffic growth and vehicle mix in line with those of "Energy Paper 65".

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assumptions are made in "Energy Paper 65" regarding the relationship between the growth in domestic product and the growth in energy demand; and how these differ from the assumptions made in "Energy Paper 58".

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The growth in gross domestic product is one of a number of factors influencing energy demand. Paragraphs 3.4 to 3.16 of "Energy Paper 65" provide details of the GDP growth rate assumptions used in both "Energy Paper 65" and "Energy Paper 58". The primary energy ratio gives an indication of the overall relationship between the GDP an energy demand. Paragraphs 6.8 to 6.9 describe the energy ratio in the new projections. This can be compared with "Energy Paper 58", where the primary energy ratio declined by 0.1 to 1 per cent. per annum between 1990 and 2005.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the methodology employed in the collection of carbon emission figures in "Energy Paper 65" is identical to the methodology employed by the intergovernmental panel on climate change.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The emissions projections in "Energy Paper 65" are based on the United Kingdom's national atmospheric emissions inventory and are consistent in almost all respects with the methodology recommended by the intergovernmental panel on climate change. The net effect on the projections of the differences in methodologies is broadly neutral.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made in "Energy Paper 65" of the likely carbon savings which the imposition of 8 per cent. value added tax on domestic fuel will achieve in 2000.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The central estimate from the "Energy Paper 65" projections for the likely carbon saving brought about by the imposition of 8 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel is approximately 0.4 MtC in 2000.

Post Offices

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines he has approved between Post Office Counters and the Post Office Users National Council concerning the relocation of Crown post offices; and if he will list cases where such guidelines have not been followed.

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the Post Office and the Post Office Users National Council.

A. F. Budge Ltd.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he *(a)* received the report from the receiver and *(b)* expects to make a decision in respect of A. F. Budge.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A report under the provisions of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 was received from the joint administrative receivers of A. F. Budge Ltd. on 28 September 1993.

Proceedings for disqualification against three directors of A. F. Budge Ltd.—Anthony Frederick Budge, Mrs Janet Budge and Michael Austin Yates—were commenced on 8 December 1994.

Regional Assistance

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whom he consulted in respect of regional assistance given by his Department within the remit of the Industry Act 1972.

Mr. Page: Regional assistance is now given under the Industrial Development Act 1982. My officials consult as necessary to establish whether a project is eligible to be considered for assistance and whether the project meets the criteria of the regional selective assistance scheme.

Construction Tile Industry

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which consultants and at what cost advised his Department in respect of sector analysis of the construction tile industry in each of the last five years.

Mr. Page: My Department is not the sponsor Department for this sector. However, in maintaining a body of market analysis for a range of departmental work, my Department uses the published material of a number of market research consultancy firms.

Interreg

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money there has been allocated by way of the Interreg II fund from the EU for projects in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Eggar: The Commission divided Interreg's 2,900 mecu budget between 2,300 mecu for the objective 1 areas and 600 mecu for the rest. Within each of these totals, the poorer eligible areas have larger allocations per head. The figures are:

	Allocation £ million	*Population thousands*	*Per capita £*
Objective 1			
All	1811	22,146	82
Northern Ireland	52.7	1,358	36
Republic of Ireland	105.1	1,735	61
Other			
All	472.4	46,859	10
Wales	10.6	595	18
England	22.3	2,238	10

Pensions (Derivatives)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has about the value of pensions business currently handled by United Kingdom insurance companies; what information he has concerning the extent to which such insurance companies are trading in derivatives; what steps he is taking in the light of the Baring affair to issue guidance to such derivative-trading insurance companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* Premium income received by UK insurance companies during 1993 in respect of personal and occupational pensions business was estimated to be £14.6 billion.

United Kingdom insurance companies may be end users of derivatives but should not be traders. Provided they have adequate controls over their use, insurance companies may prudently use derivatives for the purposes of reducing the investment risks inherent in their portfolio or for efficient portfolio management. My Department issued guidance to all UK insurers in December 1994 setting out the objectives which an adequate system of control over their investments, including derivatives, must be able to satisfy. At the same time, we asked companies for a state of play report on the extent to which their systems complied with the guidance and, where necessary, on what remedial action they had put into effect. We are currently reviewing the responses and will take such follow-up action as is necessary.

HEALTH

Nebulisers

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if nebulisers are available on prescription in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mr. Sackville: Hand-operated nebulisers are available on general practitioner prescription. It is for health authorities to make decisions about the best use of their resources on the basis of clinical priorities and local needs. Hospital consultants may prescribe equipment such as powered nebulisers as part of national health service treatment. Health authorities may provide equipment prescribed as part of NHS treatment either permanently or on loan and in these circumstances no charge may be made.

Epilepsy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about research into sudden unexplained death in epilepsy.

Mr. Bowis: The Department is aware of issues and concerns surrounding sudden unexplained death in epilepsy. However, I am not aware of any current research on this subject. The main agency through which the Government support medical and related biological research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and is always willing to consider scientifically sound proposals. The council has considerable relevant work on neuroscience research and has identified neurological disabilities, including epilepsy, as an area in which it wishes to encourage applications.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were attributed to epilepsy in the United Kingdom for each year since 1990 in each health authority for which information is available.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the number of deaths, by health authority, will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on co-operation with the Department for Education in ensuring that all schools have an active epilepsy policy.

Mr. Bowis: My officials will be consulting Department for Education officials as part of my Department's initiative on epilepsy, which I announced in the House on 17 January.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans her Department has to encourage an increase in the number of brain operations for intractable non-lesional epilepsy.

Mr. Bowis: Decisions on treatment are the responsibility of the doctors concerned, who are required to exercise their clinical judgment, informed by a patient's medical history. Health authorities and trusts are responsible for ensuring that the full range of services is available, taking account of their priorities and resources.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what training is given to medical practitioners and their staff to ensure that there is a minimum of risk to *(a)* expectant mothers with epilepsy, *(b)* mothers with epilepsy and *(c)* children of mothers with epilepsy.

(2) what advice her Department gives to health authorities in respect of carers for children with epilepsy requiring the best possible training; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The education and training of health professionals is a matter for the relevant royal college. However, as part of the programme that I announced on 17 January, we shall be seeking to raise epilepsy awareness among general practitioners and primary care teams.

Asbestos

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment the Chief Medical Officer of Health has made of health dangers associated with asbestos; what new steps her Department proposes to take; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The principal diseases caused by exposure to asbestos are asbestosis, a pneumoconiosis; primary carcinoma of the lung; malignant mesothelioma; and diffuse mesothelioma. Asbestos-related diseases take a long time to develop and are nearly always the result of occupational exposure to asbestos fibres.

Asbestos-related diseases are prescribed as industrial diseases. Such diseases occurring now largely reflect past industrial exposure before the introduction of the controls, enforcement of which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Older People (Health Care Costs)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the NHS annual budget is spent on people over 65 years of age in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bowis: We estimate that around 42 per cent. of total hospital and community health service expenditure is on people aged 65 and over, who comprise about 16 per cent. of the population.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount recouped by her Department through prescription charges in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 9 December 1994 at column *397*. Prescription charges provide valuable additional income to the national health service at a time of competing demands for resources.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in respect of what proportion of prescriptions the patient claims exemption from prescription charges, what checks are made to monitor the accuracy of such claims; and what proportion of such claims are found to be false.

Mr. Malone: In 1993, 82 per cent. of prescription items were dispensed free of charge by community pharmacists and appliance contractors to patients who declared that they were exempt or entitled to remission of charges under the national health service low income scheme. Regular checks of patients declarations carried out by family health services authorities indicate that about 1.5 per cent. are incorrect. I am determined to take action to stamp out this abuse and all other forms of fraud against the NHS.

Sight Tests

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients had their eyes tested in each year since 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The number of national health service sight tests paid for by family health services authorities in England is shown in the table:

Year	*millions*
1990–91	4.154
1991–92	4.979
1992–93	5.528
1993–94	5.935

The number of private sight tests is not available.

Measles Rubella Vaccine

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many yellow card reports of suspected adverse reactions linked to the autumn measles rubella vaccination campaign have been received by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines and Medicines Control Agency since 9 December 1994.

(2) if she will list the complications notified by the yellow card reports linked to the autumn measles rubella vaccination campaign received since 9 December 1994 in respect of *(a)* the number of individuals affected, *(b)* the number of signs and symptoms, *(c)* the number of more serious reactions, *(d)* the number of allergic reactions, *(e)* the number of reported convulsions and *(f)* the number with late neurological damage.

Mr. Sackville: Since 9 December 1994 the Medicines Control Agency has received a further 50 yellow card reports of suspected adverse reactions to measles rubella vaccine. A report for a suspected reaction does not necessarily mean that the vaccine caused the reaction. Signs and symptoms described in these reports have been classified as reactions. One hundred and fifty affected children were reported as having 281 reactions, of which 87—affecting 67 children—were considered to be serious. There were 15 allergic reactions, eight convulsions and seven late-onset neurological conditions, five of whom have recovered and two are recovering. Further information is being sought for some of the reactions to investigate their relationship with immunisation. It is estimated that eight million children have been immunised. Reporting of serious adverse reactions to date is therefore low.

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on prescribed generic drugs in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The net ingredient cost—that is, the basic cost of drugs, less discount and excluding dispensing fees, container cost on cost allowance, oxygen payments and value added tax—of drugs prescribed and dispensed generically in England in 1993 was £341.6 million. For the first three quarters of 1994 the cost was £345.4 million.

Asthma

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the mortality rates for asthma for each of the last five years, broken down by ethnic origin.

Mr. Sackville: Data on asthma deaths by ethnic origin are not available centrally.

The mortality rates for asthma for the last five years for which data are available are shown in the table:

Mortality rates[1] for asthma (ICD [2] code 493), England and Wales, 1988–92

Year	*Rates*
1988	4.0
1989	3.9
1990	3.6
1991	3.7
1992	3.5

[1] Deaths per 100,000 population.
[2] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of cases of asthma reported in each family health service authority for each of the last five years, broken down by ethnic origin.

Mr. Sackville: Data on newly diagnosed episodes of asthma are not available by ethnic origin or family health services authority. Aggregated data from returns submitted to the Birmingham research unit of the Royal College of General Practitioners are available in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys annual reference volume, "Communicable Diseases—Series MB2", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest data published are for the year 1992.

Glaucoma

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of glaucoma were diagnosed in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1993 and *(e)* the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available in the precise form requested. It is estimated that in England 101,000 patients suffering from glaucoma were treated by general practitioners during 1991–92—source: "Morbidity Statistics from General Practice". Comparative figures are not available for the other years requested. For hospital in-patients, the numbers of finished consultant episodes, ordinary admissions and day cases, during the latest available period of five years, were as follows:

Year	*Number*
1992–93	22,802
1991–92	19,826
1990–91	17,534
1989–90	17,427
1988–89	15,373

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics.

Information on numbers of out-patient cases with glaucoma is not available centrally.

Birth Certificates

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full and short version birth certificates are issued each year by the Registrar General; and how many applications are made by a person who is not the individual on the certificate nor related to them.

Mr. Sackville: In 1994 the Registrar General issued 245,961 full birth certificates and 12,469 short birth certificates. The Registrar General does not distinguish between applicants who are the subject of the certificate or their relatives and other applicants.

Arachnoiditis

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what further representations she has received about arachnoiditis and the use of Depo-Medrone;

(2) if she will make a statement on arachnoidits.

Mr. Sackville: We have received a number of representations about Depo-Medrone and arachnoiditis. Depo-Medrone is licensed for use by certain specified routes of administration only and is not recommended for epidural or spinal administration. If a doctor, however, believes that use of a licensed drug in an unlicensed manner is the only suitable treatment for a patient he or she may supply or administer the drug, having obtained informed consent from the patient.

Dental Services

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to reverse the present shortages of NHS dentists in the south-west.

Mr. Malone: At 31 December 1994 the number of dentists under contract to family health services authorities in the south-west was 1,245, 32 more than at 30 June 1992.

Family health services authorities can apply for permission to appoint salaried dentists in areas where there are shortages. We have recently given approval for two salaried dentists to be appointed by Devon family health services authority and for one salaried dentist to be appointed by Gloucestershire family health services authority.

The Green Paper, "Improving NHS Dentistry", proposes a wider role for the community dental service to treat those who cannot have ready access to general dental services.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family health services authorities have appointed salaried dentists; how many salaried dentists have been appointed since July 1992; for what additional provision district health authorities have contracted; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The number of family health services authorities that have employed salaried dentists and the number employed are shown in the table. In addition to those family health services authorities listed, Berkshire, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Hereford and Worcester, Kingston and Richmond, Northamptonshire, Gloucestershire and Solihull have also been granted permission to employ salaried dentists. At 30 September 1992 there were 2,191 whole-time equivalent hospital and community health service staff in England, excluding hospital practitioners and clinical assistants who also work as general and dental practitioners.

Table 1 number of salaried dentists for whom a contract has opened since 31 July 1992 by family health service authority

FHSA	*Salaried dentists*
Total	137
Cumbria	1
Derbyshire	3
Cambridgeshire	7
Norfolk	3
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	14
Essex	2
City and East London	22
Kent	11
Greenwich and Bexley	6
Bromley	1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	22
Surrey	5
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	1
Wiltshire	2
Isle of Wight	2
Buckinghamshire	6
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	5
Gloucestershire	4
Somerset	6
Staffordshire	2
Cheshire	8
Lancashire	2
Manchester	1
Salford	1

This is the count of the number of salaried dentists who have contracts with FHSAs.

This is not the number of salaried dentists employed at the requested dates.

(Some salaried dentists have "open contracts" with FHSAs.

This means they are ready to work when required but are not actually working).

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters concerning problems in gaining access to NHS dentistry have been received by her Department from individuals in the last five years; and if she will list those organisations that have written to her on the subject.

Mr. Malone: Since February 1990, the Department of Health has received approximately 350 letters from members of the public which were exclusively concerned with problems in gaining access to national health service general dental services.

The Department has also received a similar number of letters from hon. and right hon. Members, community health councils, local authorities, professional organisations and patient groups.

Family health service authorities continue to be the best source of information on the local availability of general dental services, and all authorities report that they are able to help patients to find NHS dentists.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total sum paid out to general dental practitioners working with the NHS in each month since April 1991.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Payments to general dental practitioners working with the national health service in England in each month since April 1991

Month	*1991–92 £ million*	*1992–93 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*
April	92.3	118.9	101.1	104.3
May	93.4	118.8	103.6	105.2
June	95.8	114.0	103.0	110.7
July	102.1	117.0	102.8	109.9
August	106.8	115.7	103.9	109.9
September	94.1	103.2	98.8	104.0
October	101.4	100.9	100.9	106.6
November	110.7	104.3	103.7	111.10
December	113.3	104.5	98.5	109.8
January	103.1	108.6	100.8	106.6
February	117.3	101.4	104.2	—
March	116.7	97.7	100.1	—

Notes:

1. The data are for England only and are drawn from monthly cash-based financial information system reports submitted by family health services authorities and the Dental Practice Board. The January data are the latest available for 1994–95.

2. Expenditure figures show the total of all general dental service payments in each month, including payments for salaried dentists and emergency dental service clinics. The figures also include the cost of employers' superannuation contributions.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per course of *(a)* NHS dental treatment, *(b)* private dental treatment and *(c)* all dental treatments for an adult patient in 1993–94, 1992–93, and 1991–92.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. Information on private treatment is not available centrally.

Average cost per adult course of treatment in the general dental service in England for the financial years 1991–92 to 1993–94

Year	*Average cost £*
1991–92	39.80
1992–93	39.11
1993–94	36.18

Source:
Dental Practice Board.
Note:
1. The information refers to the general dental service only. The cost shown is the fee paid to the dentist.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average annual number of courses of dental treatment for an adult patient in England; and what is the average cost to *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* the patient.

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table.

Information for courses of treatment completed in the year ending 31 March 1994

	£
Average number of courses of treatment per adult patient	1.62
Average annual cost to the NHS of treatment per adult patient	31.34
Average annual cost to the adult patient	£27.27

Notes:
1. The average number of courses of treatment per patient has been estimated from a sample of 70,000 courses of treatment.
2. The costs shown are the costs of adult treatment. Regular continuing care payments are not included.
3. The average to the patient represents the average for all adults, not the average to charge payers alone.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of satisfaction was recorded by the British social attitudes survey about NHS dentistry in each year since 1993.

Mr. Malone: "British Social Attitudes: the 11th Report", 1994–95 edition, found that 58 per cent. of respondents surveyed in 1993 were satisfied or very satisfied with national health service dentists. A further 18.6 per cent. were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The comparable figures from the 9th report, 1992–93 edition, were 75.3 per cent. and 16.2 per cent.

Family health services authorities report that they can help patients to find national health service dentists. The Government meet over two thirds of the cost of the general dental service. All those under 18 get free treatment and a quarter of treatments are provided free or at reduced cost.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each family health services authority, and in total, have requested help in finding a dentist since July 1992.

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library. Family health service authorities consistently report that they can help patients to find national health service dentists.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much payments to dentists have exceeded Government estimates for each year since 1987; and how much was paid by Government and how much by patients.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the tables.

Overpayment of general dental practitioners fee income, 1987–88 to 1993–94, Great Britain

	Total payment (to all DRSG principals) "Gross" payments (£ million) (1)	"Net" payment (£ million) (2)
1987–88	(5.003)	22.722
1988–89	49.276	74.494
1989–90	(13.645)	12.256
1990–91	54.582	17.921
1991–92	192.604	128.140
1992–93	65.001	62.920
1993–94	(49.354)	4.143

() Denotes a negative amount.

Overpayment of general dental practitioners fee income, 1987–88 to 1993–94, Great Britain: payment by Government

	Total Payments (to all DRSG principals) "Gross" payment (£ millions)	"Net" payment (£ millions)
1987–88	(3.544)	16.095
1988–89	34.379	51.974
1989–90	(8.511)	7.645
1990–91	35.171	11.548
1991–92	131.203	87.290
1992–93	45.536	44.078
1993–94	(34.609)	2.905

Overpayment of general dental practitioners fee income, 1987–88 to 1993–94, Great Britain: payment by patients

	Total payments (to all DRSG principals) "Gross" payment (£ millions)	"Net" payment (£ millions)
1987–88	1.459	6.627
1988–89	14.896	22.520
1989–90	5.134	4.611
1990–91	19.410	6.373
1991–92	61.400	40.850
1992–93	19.466	18.843
1993–94	14.745	1.238

Notes:

1. Column (1) shows the difference between actual gross fee payments made to dentists in the financial year and the estimates made of sums due to GDPs in the Dental Rates Study Group. The estimates include allowances for GDPs expenses. For 1993–94 an expenses allowance was not formally agreed but a notional amount decided upon for administrative and monitoring purposes.
2. Column (2) shows the difference between target net income (after balancing) and the actual net income, allowing for the practice expenses incurred. This is calculated using information from a special exercise carried out by the Inland Revenue.
3. DRSG principals are essentially general dental practitioners who have worked in the GDS for the whole of the financial year in question.
4. The overpayment sums have been allocated to patient and Government by using total net and gross expenditure figures.
5. Payments made under determinations 11-1X of the Statement of Dental Remuneration (eg maternity payments, seniority payments and direct reimbursement of expenses) are not included in the above.
6. The net payment figures for 1987–88 excludes the balancing adjustment for associate dentists (£225 "underpayment" per principal; £3.37 million in total). Subsequent to 1987–88 this adjustment was not required.
7. The figures in columns (2) and (4) for 1993–94 are provisional, and are subject to revision.

Adoption

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the timetable for adoption law reform.

Mr. Bowis: The Government intend to introduce new adoption provisions along the lines of the White Paper,"Adoption: The Future", published in November 1993, as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Smoking

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been undertaken by her Department to monitor the effects of the no-smoking campaign.

Mr. Sackville: The national three-year no-smoking campaign, which was launched in December 1994, is being undertaken by the Health Education Authority on behalf of the Department of Health. It is being evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in changing knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in the general population.

Individual components of the campaign will also be monitored for impact among specific groups.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the reduction in treatment costs of smoking-related diseases since the beginning of the current no-smoking campaign; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It is not possible to relate recent reductions in smoking prevalence to current levels of smoking-related disease. Many smoking-related diseases have a lengthy development period and most of these manifesting themselves now are related to the smoking habits prevailing some 20 or 30 years ago.

Intensive Care (Children)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the review of intensive care for children undertaken by regional health authorities and regional branches of the NHS Executive.

Mr. Sackville: The reviews confirm that plans have been made to improve the provision of paediatric intensive care. The Department is consulting on the further work required to guide the implementation of these plans towards achieving an accessible and cost effective service nationally.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to identify children's intensive care as separately defined within purchaser-provider service arrangements.

Mr. Sackville: The specification of contracts agreed between purchasers and providers for supplying children's intensive care service is a matter for local determination.

Heart Disease

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to initiate research into hypertrophic cardiomyopathy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the cardiac diseases researched by her Department and the amount spent on each, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The list of research projects recently commissioned by the Department of Health on coronary heart disease—cardiac disease—and their cost is as follows:

Recently completed research

the effects of passive smoking: review and analysis of data on the contribution of passive smoking to coronary heart disease (1-11-93 to 30-4-94—£24,335);

British Regional Heart Study: prediction and prevention of cardiovascular disease (1-10-85 to 31-12-95—£311,807);

Lipids and coronary heart disease (1-1-87 to 31-3-92—£25,000);

Coronary heart disease: the role of the GP (1-10-90 to 30-9-92—£181,232);

Randomised controlled trial of coronary risk factor intervention (1-1-93 to 31-12-93—£299,192);

National Study of Health and Growth: assessing coronary disease risk factors and bronchial reactivity in children (1-12-91 to 31-12-92—£30,123);

(All the amounts quoted for research are for the entire duration of each project).

Ongoing Research

Nottingham Heart Attack Register (1-8-88 to 31-3-98—£657,283);

Whickham revisited: cardiovascular proposal (1-3-93 to 28-2-95—£83,000);

Prospective markers of anti-oxidant status in relation to future cardiovascular disease, lung and stomach cancer (1-4-93 to 31-3-95—£183,972);

CSAG: Waiting times for coronary revascularisation (1-10-94 to 31-1-95; £38,489);

Development and validation of a weight-losing dietary intervention to reduce the risk of diabetes and CHD in South Asians (1-7-94 to 31-12-96—£176,987).

Figures for on-going projects are estimates.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the numbers and percentage of emergency ambulance calls, in each ambulance service area, which took *(a)* up to 14 minutes, *(b)* each subsequent minute up to 60 minutes and *(c)* over 60 minutes, since April 1994.

Mr. Sackville: Information on calls up to 14 minutes in urban areas can be found in the patients charter, copies of which are available in the Library. The remaining information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount of compensation has been paid to members of the public by the London ambulance service due to delays in reaching patients calling the emergency service in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Nutrition Task Force

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she has taken to ensure that the targets of the Government's nutrition task force are met; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The nutrition task force was established to help meet "The Health of the Nation" diet and nutrition targets. The task force's "Eat Well!" programme comprises a number of projects for this purpose. The ministerial Cabinet committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council, and the Chief Medical Officer's health of the nation working group, play a role in ensuring that progress towards targets is being made.

Prescription Forms

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations she has received about the information required to be obtained by those in pharmacies from those presenting prescription forms; what assessment she has made of the intrusiveness of the information required; and what arrangements are being made to print prescription forms in larger type and in ethnic minority languages;

(2) which professional bodies were consulted about the design and content of the prescription forms to be issued shortly; on which dates such consultation took place; if consultation resulted in favourable reaction to the content; how many prescription forms have been printed to date; how many remain to be printed; what is the total cost of printing and distribution; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: From 1 April 1995 the already wide-ranging national health service prescription charge exemption and remission arrangements presently covering 81 per cent. of prescription items will be further extended to include all recipients of disabled working allowance who had less than £8,000 capital at the date of their claim. The prescription form FP10 must be amended to reflect that.

I am also taking the opportunity to amend the declaration to make it applicable to all patients. In doing so the Government are responding to concerns of both the Health Select Committee and the Audit Commission, who have suggested that the laxity of the present patient declarations leave the way open for fraudulent claims. By asking all patients to sign the patient declaration we are taking an important first step in stamping out that abuse.

We are currently discussing with the general medical services committee of the British Medical Association and the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee about incorporating these changes into their terms of service. I hope to lay amending regulations in the summer.

There have been no additional printing and distribution costs. The changes were incorporated into the form during a regular print run. It has never been our practice to print prescription forms either in large print or in ethnic minority languages.

Special Hospitals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many special hospital patients are currently awaiting discharge to medium-secure units.

Mr. Bowis: The Special Hospitals Service Authority is responsible for special hospitals services; the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the authority.

Autism

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of autism have been recorded for each year since 1990.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. It is estimated that the prevalence rate of classic autism is between 0.04 and 0.05 per cent. of the population and that about 0.21 per cent. may exhibit some features of autism.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of autism treatment in the NHS for each year since 1990; and what is the projected cost for 1995.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. District health authorities are funded for purchasing health services for people with autism through their general allocations.

The table shows expenditure on the purchase of health care for people with learning disabilities, which includes autism, by health authorities in England. Expenditure for 1990–91 is not available.

Year	£
1991–92	936,503,244
1992–93	1,068,035,565
1993–94	1,132,665,837

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of ambulances reach a patient in Barnet within the patients charter target of 14 minutes; and what proportion of emergencies were taken to *(a)* Edgware general hospital and *(b)* Barnet general hospital in each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the chief executive of the London ambulance service, Mr. Martin Gorham.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the estimated cost and future savings of closing the accident and emergency unit at Edgware general hospital;

(2) what is the population currently served by *(a)* Edgware general hospital and *(b)* Barnet general hospital;

(3) what plans there are to treat sufferers of dementia by the creation of a new unit at Edgware general hospital; and what representations she has received from the Barnet branch of the Alzheimer's Disease Council on the subject.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Barnet health authority, Mr. Brian Salinger, for details. I have no record of a representation from the Barnet Alzheimer's Disease Council.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the Wellhouse Trust concerning the level of resources at Barnet general hospital in the light of the increase in the number of in-patients from the Edgware area.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Drug Overdoses

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of recorded deaths from *(a)* methadone and *(b)* heroin overdoses in each of the past three years.

Mr. Sackville: The data are published in table 10 of the publication, "Mortality statistics, injury and poisoning, England and Wales", series DH4, Nos. 16–18, copies of which are available in the Library.

Minor Accident Treatment

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients attending a minor accident treatment unit are subsequently referred to an accident and emergency department.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines she has issued to health authorities and trusts in relation to the employment of nurses or assistants who are or have suffered from anorexia nervosa, bulimia or other eating disorders.

Mr. Malone: Guidance on pre-employment assessment of prospective national health service employees is contained in HSG (94) 51, "Occupational Health Services for NHS staff", copies of which are available in the Library.

Neuro-Surgery Units, London

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the neuro-surgery units situated in *(a)* Greater London, *(b)* South Thames region and *(c)* North Thames region; and what were their capacity and occupancy rates on the night of 6 March.

Mr. Sackville: The information is as follows:

Neuro-surgery units situated in Greater London:

Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust, The Bethlem and Maudsley NHS Trust, St. George's NHS Trust, The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust, The Hospitals for Sick Children, Havering Hospitals NHS Trust, The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, The Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust and The Royal Hospitals NHS Trust.

Neuro-surgery units in South Thames:

Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust, The Bethlem and Maudsley NHS Trust, St. George's NHS Trust and Mid Sussex NHS Trust.

Neuro-surgery units in North Thames:

The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust, The Royal Free Hospital Hampstead NHS Trust, The Hospitals for Sick Children, Havering Hospitals NHS Trust, The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery and The Royal Hospitals NHS Trust.

Information on units' capacity and occupancy rates on the night of 6 March is not available centrally. South Thames regional office is conducting an urgent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Malcolm Murray, and capacity and occupancy levels is one of the areas being investigated.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the neuro-surgery units which were contacted by Queen Mary's hospital, Sidcup, on the night of 6 March in relation to the case raised by the hon. Member for Woolwich in his letter dated 7 March; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. William Wells, chairman of South Thames regional health authority.

South Thames regional office is conducting an urgent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Malcolm Murray.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste, Drigg

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates of each seizure and checking of waste consignments to Drigg made by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution during the year 1990; which of these consignments breached the Drigg authorisation; and if he will give the nature of the breach.

Mr. Atkins: One seizure was made at the Drigg site on 31 August 1990. The consignment was found to include one aerosol can with free liquid, and a dry cell battery. This constituted a very minor breach of the Drigg disposal authorisation.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the waste consignment for Drigg seized by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in December 1994 conformed to all the conditions within the Drigg authorisation; and when Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution report was completed and delivered to his Department.

Mr. Atkins: Results of the waste consignment for Drigg seized in December 1994 are not yet known.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual emolument paid to members of the Countryside Commission; and what are the total emolument and expenses paid to each current serving member since his or her appointment.

Mr. Atkins: As chairman of the Countryside Commission, Sir John Johnson's remuneration is £37,065 for a three day week. The remaining commissioners each receive remuneration of £5,320 based on a minimum input of two days per month, although a number of commissioners regularly devote more time than this.

Expenses are paid in line with standard civil service terms and conditions. Total expenses claimed by each commissioner from April 1993 to date are as follows. Earlier figures are not readily available.

	£
Sir John Johnson KCMG	10,779.07
Rachel Thomas	10,361.00
David Fletcher MBE	5,033.90
Professor Allan Patmore CBE	2,814.97
Sir Richard Carew Pole	2,194.86
Lord Denham[1]	1,593.46
Sarah Ward	1,345.55
Rodney Swarbrick CBE[1]	805.03

[1] Appointment from 1 August 1993.

Exhaust Cleaning

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities requesting Government assistance to fund the fitting of test exhaust cleaning devices on *(a)* buses, *(b)* public sector vehicles, and *(c)* other vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has had initial discussions with one local authority about the possibility of providing Government support for assessment and monitoring work associated with the experimental fitting of particulate trap assemblies to public sector vehicles. There are no plans, however, to provide funds for the fitting and operation of such devices.

Information Technology

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to encourage local councils to adopt a strategic approach to making the new information and communications technologies available to the local community.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None. It is for individual councils to determine their own local priorities and strategies, including about such matters as the use of information and communications technologies.

Rents

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent for new lettings by housing associations; and what was the equivalent figure for 1989.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information collected by the National Federation of Housing Associations shows that the average rent for housing association new lettings in the quarter ending 30 September 1994 was £45.63.

The equivalent figure for 1989 was £23.64.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent paid by tenants of *(a)* private landlords and *(b)* local councils: and what were the equivalent figures in each category for 1978–79 in actual and real terms.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Estimates of average rents paid before deduction of housing benefit or its earlier equivalent are as follows. The latest figures for private rents are for 1993–94 and so local authority rents are shown for the same year:

	Tenants of local authorities	*Tenants of private landlords £ per week*
1993–94 actual	33.70	60.00
1978–79 actual	5.90	6.30
1978–79 at 1993–94 prices	16.90	18.10

Sources:
Local authority rents: returns made by local authorities.
Private rents: Private Renters Survey 1978–79, Survey of English Housing 1993–94.
Notes:
1. Rents are for England.
2. Private rents are from household surveys and are subject to sampling error.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses have been received by his Department from residents of Dorset, excluding Bournemouth and Poole, since the Local Government

Commission published its preferred options for reorganisation; and how many *(a)* supported the proposed changes and *(b)* rejected them.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As at 6 March, we had received 1,776 letters from members of the public residing in Dorset outside Bournemouth and Poole. Of these 69 support the Local Government Commission's final recommendations for Dorset and 1,707 are against the recommendations.

Trust Councils Initiative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has undertaken into, and what assessment has been made of, the trust councils initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have no plans for a trust councils initiative.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how his Department intends the producer responsibility industry group plan to be financed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have introduced enabling powers in the Environment Bill to place an obligation on businesses to recover and recycle packaging waste. Individual businesses may choose to discharge this obligation by acting alone or by collaborating with others in an "exemption scheme" which will deliver targets on their behalf. The internal financing of exemption schemes is a matter for business, subject only to satisfying the requirements of competition legislation and the registration requirements of the environment agencies.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what progress has been made to produce a plan for recovering between 50 per cent. and 75 per cent. of all packaging waste by the year 2000;

(2) what are the criteria by which his Department judged the plan for reducing waste produced by the producer responsibility industry group.

Mr. Atkins: The producer responsibility group was formed in 1993 to respond to the challenge to businesses concerned with packaging to develop an industry-led approach for delivering recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste. Among the objectives which Government set the PRG were the need for an effective organisation, spanning all the relevant business sectors, which can both draw up a plan and put it into action; and the need for a commitment by business that it will meet the costs necessary to fund new collection and processing capacity, together with a mechanism for raising the necessary finances.

The PRG produced its final report in November last year and has now disbanded. Work on refining its approach and the ways in which industry might organise itself to meet recycling targets has been taken forward by the VALPAK working representative advisory group—V-WRAG.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legislation the Government have introduced to reduce packaging.

Mr. Atkins: Having considered the request from businesses in the packaging industry, we have included three clauses, numbers 76-78, in the Environment Bill which will, subject to parliamentary approval, establish enabling powers to promote or secure the re-use, recovery and recycling of products or materials when they become waste. We propose to apply these powers to packaging waste.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates have been made of the rise in packaging over the last 10 years.

Mr. Atkins: No estimates exist as to variations in the amount of packaging as a whole over the last 10 years. The Department of the Environment "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics", however, does include statistics for consumption of some types of recyclable packaging. This publication is available in the Library.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what measures have been introduced to ensure the United Kingdom meets the targets for the 70 per cent. reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions by 2005 and 80 per cent. by 2010, as agreed under the UN Economic Commission for Europe's second sulphur protocol;

(2) what action his Department has taken to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions;

(3) what measures he has introduced to ensure the United Kingdom meets its targets for the 40 per cent. reduction in 1980 level of sulphur dioxide emissions by 1998 as agreed under the Brussels directive of 1990.

Mr. Atkins: The Secretary of State published the United Kingdom national plan for the reduction of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions in December 1990. The plan aims to deliver the UK commitment, under the 1988 large combustion plants directive, to a 40 per cent. reduction in 1980 levels of sulphur dioxide emissions from large combustion plants by 1998.

My Department is preparing a national sulphur strategy to meet the targets for reduction in total sulphur dioxide emissions to which the UK is committed under the UN Economic Commission for Europe's second sulphur protocol and will be consulting on the strategy in due course.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the level of sulphur dioxide emissions in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979.

Mr. Atkins: The list following gives estimated emissions of sulphur dioxide, by source, for 1979–1992.

Estimated emissions of sulphur dioxides (SO_2) by source category for 1979–1992

Thousand tonnes

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Power stations	3,242	3,007	2,847	2,748	2,631	2,589	2,627	2,722	2,830	2,728	2,640	2,722	2,534	2,427
Domestic	264	226	210	202	195	158	202	197	171	155	138	118	115	103

Estimated emissions of sulphur dioxides (SO_2) by source category for 1979–1992

Thousand tonnes

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Commercial/public service	221	197	178	170	143	148	128	135	107	101	89	90	83	84
Refineries	228	237	185	165	117	115	96	108	102	97	109	109	115	131
Iron and steel	244	128	116	101	83	75	80	80	80	85	89	88	83	83
Other industrial combustion	1,139	930	738	667	552	491	456	517	481	509	505	497	493	518
Non-combustion processes	36	35	30	26	27	27	26	24	22	23	22	19	18	14
Extraction and dist. of fossil	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Road Transport	55	42	53	49	42	43	45	50	46	54	61	63	58	62
Railways	14	11	9	8	5	6	5	5	4	4	3	3	3	3
Civil aircraft	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	—	2	1	—	1	2	3
Shipping	67	62	53	57	52	55	50	48	45	46	57	61	61	60
Agriculture	30	21	17	15	12	10	8	9	8	7	7	8	8	8
Total	5,542	4,899	4,438	4,213	3,862	3,721	3,726	3,897	2,900	3,813	3,722	3,782	3,574	3,500

Source:
Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics No. 16 1994

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been carried out by his Department into the effects of sulphur dioxide emissions.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has undertaken a large programme of scientific research over several years into the effects on the environment of sulphur dioxide emissions. The scientific findings have been reviewed by several of the Department's expert advisory groups, including the review group on acid rain, the terrestrial effects review group and the critical loads advisory group. Copies of their reports are available in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the differences in the sulphur dioxide emissions produced by hazardous waste incinerators and those produced by cement kilns.

Mr. Atkins: All operators of the hazardous waste incinerators and cement plants are required to monitor sulphur dioxide emissions. Cement plants produce higher amounts of sulphur dioxide. This is because hazardous waste incinerators dispose of wastes that mostly contain no sulphur, while cement plants use fossil fuels and raw materials that contain significant amounts of sulphur.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his oral statement of 2 March on the explicit promises made by county and district councils about improved co-operation and delegation of functions, if he expects such promises to involved more or less local government expenditure; and what account he will take of such promises in future local government finance settlements.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We would expect better co-operation and delegation to enable local services to be improved at no extra cost.

Alkyl Phenol Ethoxylates

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been carried out by his Department on the effects of alkyl phenol ethoxylates on human health.

Mr. Atkins: We and the Department of Health have commissioned the Institute for Environment and Health to review current information on possible oestrogenic effects of chemicals, including alkyl phenol ethoxylates, entering the environment. It is expected to be completed by mid 1995.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been carried out by his Department on the level of alkyl phenol ethoxylates in British rivers.

Mr. Atkins: The report from our current research on the effects of sewage effluent on fish, will include some data on levels of alkyl phenol ethoxylates in rivers. This report is expected to be completed by mid 1995.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department has taken to phase out the use of alkyl phenol ethoxylates.

Mr. Atkins: In accordance with a recommendation of the Paris Commission the United Kingdom is committed to phasing out by the year 2000, those uses of nonyl phenol ethoxylate which lead to discharge to water. This recommendation was agreed in 1992 and, in the UK, is pertinent for uses of nonyl phenol ethoxylate in industrial cleaning agents; it has not been used in domestic cleaning agents for the last 15 years. As part of the phase-out, the UK has surveyed all the main uses of ethoxylates. We are now considering the substitution of materials which are less damaging to the aquatic environment.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the allocation of the European regional development fund to each of the objective 1, 2 and 5b regions in England for the current programming period.

Mr. Curry: The amount of European regional development fund grant available under each objective 1, 2 and 5b area in England for the current programming period is set out in the table. The programme documents for each objective area contain financial details in ecus. The table shows the sterling equivalent, at the current

exchange rate, for the European regional development fund.

Objective area	ERDF grant £ million (1994 prices)
Objective 1 (1994–99)	
Merseyside	380
Objective 2 (1994–96)	
West Midlands	222
Yorkshire and Humberside	187
North East England	185
Greater Manchester/Lancashire/Cheshire	184
East Midlands	47
East London and Lee Valley	44
Plymouth	18
West Cumbria and Furness	15
Thanet	10
Objective 5(b) (1994–99)	
South West England	116
Northern Uplands	52
East Anglia	32
Lincolnshire	30
English Marches	19
Midlands Uplands	7

New Households

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new households are projected in the west midlands; and if this figure is in line with the regional guidance plan.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The recently-published 1992-based household projections indicate 2,338 million households for the west midlands by 2011. This is an increase of 295,000 over the number in 1991. The draft regional planning guidance for the west midlands was based on earlier—1989-based—projections, which showed an increase of 244,000 households between 1991 and 2011. The Secretary of State is considering the need for any revision of the guidance in the light of the new figures.

Standard Spending Assessments, Dorset

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what have been the increases in the various categories of standard spending assessments for Dorset compared with inflation for each year since 1990.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is as follows:

Percentage change in Dorset County Council's Standard Spending Assessment 1990–91 to 1995–96 by major service block

	Service Block								Change in GDP deflator[3]
Year	Education Per cent.	PSS[1] Per cent.	Police Per cent.	Fire Per cent.	Highways Per cent.	OSB[2] Per cent.	Capital Per cent.	Total Per cent.	Per cent.
1990–91 to 1991–92	17.1	23.0	10,0	14.7	13.4	39.1	12.9	17.7	6.3
1991–92 to 1992–93	8.5	7.3	18.0	7.6	–0.2	36.2	–11.2	8.2	4.0
1992–93 to 1993–94[4]	4.4	3.6	3.9	2.7	5.5	–2.8	0.1	3.4	3.1
1993–94 to 1994–95[4]	3.2	–1.4	4.2	0.9	0.1	–0.5	–8.5	1.1	[5]2.0
1994–95 to 1995–96[4]	1.1	0.2	[6]—	2.2	2.2	5.4	–6.2	0.9	[5]3.3

Notes:
[1]Personal Social Services.
[2]'Other Services' Block.
[3]The GDP deflator is a measure of domestically generated inflation in the economy.
[4]Adjusted for changes in function and responsibility.
[5]Projections published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report in 1994.
[6]Dorset Police Authority will be responsible for providing police services in the Dorset area from April 1995.

Housing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to develop an energy efficient growth in housing in the west midlands; and if he will make it his policy to take greater account of environmental factors in respect of housing developments.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Measures to secure greater energy efficiency in housing and to take account of energy efficiency and other environmental factors when housing is being planned are part of the Government's strategy for sustainable development.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of new housing starts in January and February; and what was the figure for these months in 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It is estimated that in Great Britian there were 13,200 new dwellings started during January 1995 and 15,400 in January 1994, on a not seasonally adjusted basis. In February 1994 16,600 dwellings were started.

These figures are as reported to the Department together with estimates for those local authorities which have not sent in statistical returns for their districts. They cover the total of housebuilding by private builders, housing associations and the public sector.

Figures for February 1995 are not yet available.

Nirex

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the role of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution at the planning inquiry into the application by Nirex to build a rock characterisation facility at Longlands farm.

Mr. Atkins: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has no formal role at the planning inquiry into the application by Nirex to build a rock characterisation facility at Longlands farm.

Housing, Wandsworth

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the chief executive of Wandsworth council, Mr. Gerald Jones, on the report of Mr. Rowland Little, the appointed auditor for the council, on the council's housing, homeless, and temporary accommodation policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There have been no such discussions. This is a matter between the local authority and the district auditor.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present number of homeless families from the London borough of Wandsworth who have now been placed in bed-and-breakfast or temporary accommodation outside the borough.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is not available in the Department.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many council properties that have been sold in the London borough of Wandsworth in each year since 1980;

(2) how many local authority properties in the London borough of Wandsworth have been sold under the priority sales scheme in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Tables presenting latest available information on total sales of council homes reported by each local authority from 1979–80 to March 1994 are in the Library. These also show the number of sales made under right-to-buy legislation, but information collected on other sales does not identify individual schemes within a local authority.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority houses or flats were built in the London borough of Wandsworth in each year since 1980.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The publications "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Area: 1980 to 1989" and "Local Housing Statistics" show estimates of housebuilding completions in local authority areas of London. They show completions by sector, including activity by local authorities.

"Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Area: 1980 to 1989" shows figures for the period 1980 to 1984. "Local Housing Statistics" shows figures for later years: Issue No. 103 covers the years 1985 to 1990; No. 105 covers 1991; No. 106 covers 1992; and No. 110 covers 1993. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Local authorities' primary housing tasks are now the efficient management of their own stock of housing and enabling other organisations to provide new housing, and Housing associations are the main providers of new social housing.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the number of registered homeless families in the London borough of Wandsworth in each year since 1980.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is available in a table in the Library which summarises the reported data on homeless households accepted for permanent rehousing by each local authority in England for the years 1979 to 1993.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were on the housing waiting lists in the London borough of Wandsworth in each of the last five years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The annual housing investment programme—HIP—returns submitted by Wandsworth show the following numbers of households on their housing waiting lists on the 1 April in each of the last five years:

1990: 7,292
1991: 7,027
1992: 7,384
1993: 6,913
1994: 6,561

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the present number of empty council-owned properties in the London borough of Wandsworth;

(2) how many local authority properties in the London borough of Wandsworth are for sale.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest information held by my Department relates to dwellings vacant on 1 April 1994 when Wandsworth borough council reported a total of 615 vacant dwellings, of which 439 dwellings were to be sold. The data comes from its 1994 housing investment programme return, a copy of which is in the Library.

Objective 1 Projects

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation he has made of the delivery and adequacy of support to small and medium-sized enterprises via objective 1; and whether the range of support on offer meets their needs.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on Monday 20 February, *Official Report*, column *93*.

It is early days to make an evaluation of that support, since projects are only starting to get underway. We will be monitoring and evaluating objective 1 projects closely.

Social Housing

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, columns *685–86*, on what date he expects the background information on the need for new social housing lettings to be published.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We will make the information available as soon as it is possible.

Housing Associations

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if housing associations are regarded by his Department as subject to management supervision by his Department or by the Housing Corporation for the purpose of the EU public procurement directive.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No, but the Government are considering the position of housing associations in the light of a recent ruling by the European court regarding similar bodies in another state, and legal opinions brought to my Department's attention. I will write to the hon. Member when we have completed this further consideration.

Hampshire County Council

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have been employed by Hampshire county council each year since 1979.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is as follows.

Number of people employed by Hampshire County Council in General Services (excluding Law & Order services) at June of each year:

Year	Numbers employed
1979	51,748
1980	47,419
1981	48,669
1982	47,573
1983	48,366
1984	48,248
1985	48,141
1986	50,764
1987	51,698
1988	52,518
1989	51,152
1990	50,427
1991	49,746
1992	50,831
1993	43,451
1994	44,395

Source:
Joint Staffing watch for England
Notes:
(i) Polytechnics and higher education institutions were transferred from the local authority sector in April 1989.
(ii) Further education institutions became the responsibility of the Further Education Funding Council in April 1993.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the annual expenditure of Hampshire county council each year since 1979 expressed in cash terms, real terms and as a real term percentage increase or decrease on 1979 and on the previous year.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The available information is as follows. There were two changes in the system of financing authorities in the period covered by the figures in the table, along with a number of changes in local authority responsibilities. In particular, in April 1989 responsibility for polytechnics was taken out of local authority control, and in April 1993 responsibility for further education was transferred to the Further Education Funding Council. Net revenue expenditure increased in 1994–95 through expenditure financed by the care in the community special grant. For these reasons it is not always valid to make comparisons either between financial systems, or between years within a financial system.

Hampshire county council expenditure

	Cash £ million	1994–95 prices £ million	Real increase over 1982–83 figure Percentage	Real increase over previous year Percentage
Total expenditure (outturn)				
1982–83	458.251	825.546	—	—
1983–84	473.714	815.577	–1.2	–1.2
1984–85	482.349	791.427	–4.1	–3.0
1985–86	500.475	777.786	–5.8	–1.7
1986–87	529.511	798.813	–3.2	2.7
1987–88	578.833	829.076	0.4	3.8
1988–89	628.143	843.278	2.1	1.7
1989–90	658.829	826.728	0.1	–2.0
Net Revenue Expenditure to compare with SSA (outturn)				
1990–91	724.996	842.270	2.0	1.9
1991–92	809.140	884.448	7.1	5.0
1992–93	888.472	933.971	13.1	5.6
1993–94	840.713	857.527	3.9	–8.2
1994–95[1]	935.579	935.579	13.3	9.1

Note:
[1]Budget estimate.

County Council Reserves

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in rank order the amount of cash reserves held by each of the county councils.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest available estimates of the level of reserves as at 1 April 1994 are as follows. The authorities are ranked by order of reserves excluding those held by schools, non-LMS; schools' reserves are shown separately, LMS. The first column, non-LMS reserves, includes funds, which may be substantial, held for specified purposes which may not be available to the council for general use, for example funds to finance capital projects to which the authority is committed; and insurance funds where the authority is bearing its own insurance risks. These estimates are subject to amendment as authorities finalise their accounts. Compatible data on the use of balances in 1994–95 which would be needed to derive an estimate of the level of reserves at 1 April 1995 is not yet available.

Estimated level of reserves at 1 April 1994

County Councils	Non-LMS £000	LMS £000
Nottingham	–1,492	14,965
Shropshire	–557	7,789
Isle of Wight	2,258	1,516
Leicestershire	2,540	14,305
Northamptonshire	2,629	10,191
Dorset	3,510	6691

Estimated level of reserves at 1 April 1994

County Councils	*Non-LMS £000*	*LMS £000*
Derbyshire	6,732	13,078
Bedfordshire	7,114	15,674
Cumbria	7,822	3,514
Warwickshire	8,576	7,015
Hereford and Worcester	10,305	14,112
West Sussex	12,070	4,748
Gloucestershire	12,252	7,041
Durham	12,549	7,810
Oxfordshire	13,162	12,395
Cleveland	13,474	9,239
Northumberland	14,573	3,666
Suffolk	14,982	13,120
Avon	16,205	11,403
Wiltshire	17,260	6.697
Humberside	23,735	8.701
Cornwall	24,354	7,371
North Yorkshire	24,776	11,828
Norfolk	24,791	9,059
East Sussex	29,181	5,829
Somerset	30,901	5,575
Cheshire	30,979	17,584
Lincolnshire	32,774	13,876
Hertfordshire	32,881	23,522
Kent	35,234	12,513
Staffordshire	38,073	10,351
Buckinghamshire	38,981	8,609
Lancashire	39,138	32,976
Berkshire	39,574	43,883
Devon	41,419	10,439
Cambridgeshire	48,602	7,930
Essex	49,465	25,039
Hampshire	67,407	25,310
Surrey	69,410	5,545

Source:

Level of reserves (outturn) at 1/4/93 appropriations to/withdrawals from reserves 1993–94 (RS returns for 1993–94).

Student Accommodation

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to bring in a system of national licensing for those properties in multiple occupation which are inhabited by students.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The period for responses to my Department's consultation paper on the case for licensing houses in multiple occupation closed on 18 February. Several of these responses drew attention to the particular problems associated with student accommodation. We are now considering what action to take in the light of these responses and an announcement will be made in due course.

Local Government Conduct

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines he issues regarding the part councillors who declare an interest in a planning application can take in making decisions on that application.

Sir Paul Beresford: We have issued guidance on disclosure of members interests in DOE circular 8/90—"The National Code of Local Government Conduct", and in DOE circular 9/92—"Pecuniary Interests of Members of Local Authorities".

Water Bills

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage of unpaid water bills last year overall and in each of the water company's areas.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested is not collected either by my Department or the Office of Water Services.

Northumberland Coast

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present position with regard to the proposed special protection area on the Northumberland coast; if he will make a statement; what plans he has to introduce restrictions on the collection of bait from the foreshore on the north-east coastline; and what powers he has to designate an area for protection when it is to the seaward side of the mean low water mark.

Sir Paul Beresford: My officials are consulting owners and occupiers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to introduce any restrictions on bait digging above those currently in force at the Lindisfarne national nature reserve. The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 provide for the designation of European marine sites.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest have been *(a)* damaged and *(b)* destroyed by (i) development and (ii) other means in England in each year since 1979.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available in the form requested. Statistical information on damage to SSSIs in Great Britain between 1 April 1984 and 31 March 1991 is set out in the annual reports of the former Nature Conservancy Council. Since 1 April 1991, similar detail for England is contained in English Nature's annual reports. Copies of annual reports are in the Library.

Hedgerows

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what length of hedgerow has been lost in England each year since 1979.

Mr. Atkins: Reliable figures are not available in the form requested. However, two surveys carried out for my Department covering the periods 1984–1990 and 1990–1993 indicated net losses of hedgerow in England of 85,000 km and 49,000 km respectively. These figures include losses caused by lack of management as well as by deliberate removal. The latest survey showed that the rate of removal of hedges during 1990–93 more than halved compared with 1984–90.

Homelessness

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households have been accepted as homeless in each local authority in rural areas in England in each year since 1979.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The data collected from local authorities on homeless households accepted for permanent re-housing does not differentiate between households from rural and non-rural areas. A summary print showing the reported acceptances in each local

authority area in England for the years 1979 to 1993 is in the Library.

Eland House

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement concerning facilities and arrangements for disabled people working in or visiting his Department's new building, Eland house.

Sir Paul Beresford: Eland house is currently under construction and will then be fitted out by my Department. It is my policy that we should follow best practice in providing facilities for disabled persons and we will ensure that the facilities and arrangements for disabled persons at the new building comply fully with code of practice, BS5810, and part M of the Building Regulations 1991.

Enterprise Zone, Tyneside

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, when he expects to announce the location of the proposed enterprise zone on Tyneside following the closure of Swan Hunter's shipyard, following the oral statement of 12 May 1993, *Official Report*, columns 801–02.

Sir Paul Beresford: The three local authorities concerned, and the Tyne and Wear development corporation, have submitted a package of sites for consideration. This is currently being examined by Ministers and an announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the implications for the protection of the environment which will result from the agreement reached between British Nuclear Fuels plc and Scottish Nuclear, for the long-term management and reprocessing of spent thermal oxide nuclear fuels at Sellafield.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Any contract entered into by British Nuclear Fuels is a matter for that company, but any operations at Sellafield which result from such a contract will have to comply with the limits and conditions of the site discharge authorisations. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is satisfied that compliance with these authorisations will fully protect the environment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parliament Buildings, Stormont

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to restore the Assembly chamber at Parliament buildings, Stormont, after the fire; and if the new chamber will be a replication of the previous design and decor.

Mr. Moss: Following the completion of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and forensic investigation, the process of salvaging material which might assist with restoration has begun, as has a detailed examination of the extent of the damage. When these exercises are completed, a decision will be taken on the restoration of the chamber.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to receive the report from Sir Reginald Doyle on the fire and related matters at the Parliament buildings, Stormont.

Mr. Moss: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to receive the report from Sir Reginald Doyle before the end of March.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown by age of the members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Sir John Wheeler: The age distribution of members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as at 1 March 1995 is set out.

RUC regular age band	*Number*
20 and under	7
21–25	430
26–30	1,544
31–35	2,036
36–40	1,658
41–45	1,203
46–50	853
51–55	502
56–60	221
61 and over	14
Total	8,468

RUC Reserve (Full-time)

Age band	*Number*
20 and Under	2
21–25	287
26–30	620
31–35	642
36–40	431
41–45	360
46–50	320
51–55	261
56–60	228
61 and Over	31
Total	3,182

RUC reserve (part-time)

Age band	*Number*
20 and Under	9
21–25	149
26–30	221
31–35	233
36–40	205
41–45	209
46–50	173
51–55	168
56–60	114
61 and Over	20
Total	1,501

Citizens Charters

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the costs of production and distribution of the Northern Ireland charter and where copies can be obtained by the public.

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland citizens charter which was published on 5 February 1992 cost £30,000 to produce and £4,200 to distribute. It is sold through HMSO at a cost of £8.50 per copy. A free summary guide is available from the Northern Ireland citizens charter unit on a freephone number, 0800 243174, and by using a freepost address, Freepost BE111 Belfast BT4 3SX, and at libraries and citizen's advice bureaux offices.

Copies of the main charter can be inspected at libraries and citizen's advice bureaux offices.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the costs of production and distribution of, and the availability of the charters of the Government Departments in Northern Ireland, with special reference to *(a)* the patients and clients charter, *(b)* the Social Security Agency charter, *(c)* the Training and Employment Agency charter, *(d)* the Northern Ireland Housing Executive charter *(e)* the Northern Ireland railways charter, *(f)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary charter, *(g)* the Ulsterbus and Citybus charter, *(h)* the Child Support Agency charter, *(i)* the Driver and Vehicle Licensing (Northern Ireland) charter and *(j)* the Courts and Compensation Agency charter.

Sir John Wheeler: The table gives details of the cost of production and distribution and the availability of the charters of the Government Departments in Northern Ireland.

Individual public service organisations are responsible for producing and distributing their own charters for those who use their services. The table shows costs and other details of production and distribution in so far as they are available centrally.

Northern Ireland citizens charters and charter standard statements

Charter/Charter Statement	*Cost of Publication* £	*Cost of Distribution* £	*Where available*
Patients and Clients	67,218 (includes the summary guide)	18,110 (includes the summary guide)	All health and personal social services bodies and related organisations. A summary guide was produced and distributed to every household in Northern Ireland
Social Security Agency Customer Charter	4,443	60 approx	Copies were issued to voluntary organisations, Chief Librarians and advice bodies. Copies available in all Social Security Agency Offices
Training and Employment Agency Customers Charter	11,000	None	All Agency local offices
Parents Charter	105,000	9,000	On request from the Department of Education. Copies were distributed, at the launch in September 1992, through schools, to all parents
Northern Ireland Housing Executive Tenants Charter	61,817	38,532	Initially copies were posted at the launch of the Charter in September 1992 to all tenants. New tenants get a copy on signing the tenancy agreement. All district offices of the NIHE have copies
Northern Ireland Railways Passengers Charter	30,000	None	Libraries, government outlets and all main NI Railways stations.
Royal Ulster Constabulary Charter	25,000 (includes cost of publication, distribution and advertising	—	All RUC stations and RUC Headquarters
Ulsterbus/Citybus Passengers Charter	10,611	Minimal as copies were placed in bus stations	At bus stations
Child Support Agency (NI) Charter	66,175 (includes reprint costsincurred in November 1994)	£60	The Charter was widely distributed on the launch of the Agency in April 1993 and copies are available from the Agency's headquarters and each of its seven local offices.
NI Court Services	5,065	Less than £500	NI Court Service, Communications Unit, Court Offices, Citizen Advice Bureaux offices and public libraries throughout NI

Northern Ireland citizens charters and charter standard statements

Charter/Charter Statement	*Cost of Publication £*	*Cost of Distribution £*	*Where available*
Redundancy Service	1,514	None	Redundancy Services Offices, Training and Employment Agency offices, Social Security Agency office and Citizen's Advice Bureaux offices.
Driver and Vehicle Licensing (NI)	878	Minimal as copies were placed in local offices	Copies are available in all DVLI local offices
Compensation Agency	Publication and distribution costs total £500		Agency offices, solicitors dealing with compensation claims, Citizen Advice Bureaux and Victims Support Groups
Valuation and Lands Agency	1,485	None—distributed by Agency Staff as part of their duties	Copies are available at Agency Headquarters, District Offices and Rate Collection Offices
Belfast Action Teams	8,245	600	Belfast Action Team offices, local libraries and on request. Copies were also circulated within NI Government Departments
Government Purchasing Service	850	Minimal - distributed at seminars and on request by post	From all Government Purchasing Service Managers and Headquarters
Our Service Standards (Department of Agriculture NI)	12,800	5,500	Approximately 30,000 copies distributed to individual addresses. Copies are also available from Divisional Veterinary Offices, County Agricultural Development Offices, District Forest Offices and the Department's Communications Unit

Forensic Science Laboratory

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the £4 million planned for the Forensic Science Laboratory in Northern Ireland in 1994–95 was spent preparing to become an executive agency.

Sir John Wheeler: Approximately £180,000.

Public Expenditure Plans

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reason there is a planned decrease in spending between 1994 and 1997 in *(a)* industry, energy, trade and employment, *(b)* transport and *(c)* environmental and miscellaneous services referred to in table 1.1 of "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97".

Sir John Wheeler: The planned decreases in Northern Ireland public expenditure cash plans in these areas is accounted for mainly by the completion of the privatisation payments to Harland and Wolff and Shorts—industry, energy, trade and employment; the completion of the Belfast cross-harbour bridge—transport; and a rephasing of capital expenditure on water and sewerage—environmental and miscellaneous services.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the four construction projects on which £25 million will be spent on the police building programme, referred to in table 4.3 of "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97".

Sir John Wheeler: Table 4.3 of "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97" shows the Police Authority for Northern Ireland's plans, as at 31 March 1994, to take forward work, on construction projects valued at more than £50,000 each, costing a total of £25 million in the 1995–96 year.

At that date, these plans included four new projects—three replacement police stations and a further phase of a regional support centre—costing a total of £6 million, in the 1995–96 year. The remainder of the planned expenditure for that year is in respect of on-going projects started in previous years.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the meaning of the term DRC in section 1.5 of "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97"; and for what reasons it needed an increase of £13 million allocated to it in 1993–94.

Sir John Wheeler: The term DRC stands for departmental running costs and is explained in paragraph 11.2 of the plans. The £13 million increase, relating to capital and DRC end-year flexibility carryover, was required in 1993–94 due to slippage in planned expenditure in 1992–93.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown of the £7 million allocated each year to community relations in the years 1994–95 to 1996–97, mentioned in section 1.4 of "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97".

Sir John Wheeler: The resources available for community relations are directed at consolidating a range of major initiatives which are designed to increase cross-community contact and encourage greater mutual understanding and respect of different cultures and traditions. Since publication of the current edition of "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", I have announced on 6 December 1994, that the resources available will be increased.

Over the period 1994–95 to 1996–97 these resources will be allocated as follows:

	1994–95 £000	*1995–96 £000*	*1996–97 £000*
Central Community Relations Unit[1]	4,414	5,307	5,457
Department of Education for Northern Ireland[2]	2,638	3,133	3,333
Department of Finance and Personnel (Policy, Planning and Research Unit[3])	250	300	305
Total	7,302	8,740	9,095

Notes:

[1]These resources will be directed to the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, district council community relations programme, community reconciliation bodies, cultural traditions programme and capital programme.

[2] The main elements of DENI's programme are the cross-community contact scheme, cultural traditions programme and voluntary reconciliation bodies.

[3]This will support an information, evaluation and research programme.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons table 4.18 of "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97" does not contain projected expenditure on *(a)* the electoral service and *(b)* the state pathology service; and what was the actual expenditure on these services in 1994–95 and the projected expenditure in 1995–96 and 1996–97.

Sir John Wheeler: The statistics relating to the electoral service and the state pathology service contained in "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97" have customarily, in common with a number of other statistical tables in the report, dealt only with historic information.

The information requested is as follows:

£ thousands

	1994–95 (Estimated outturn)	*1995–96 (Main estimates provision)*	*1996–97 (Planned expenditure)*
Electoral service	1,225	1,254	1,232
State pathology service	874	910	892

Social Fund

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the allocation for the European social fund to Northern Ireland for the current programming period.

Sir John Wheeler: Under the single programming document 1994 to 1999, Northern Ireland will earn 354 mecu, approximately £274 million, from the European social fund. Around 24 mecu, approximately £18 million, will also be earned through the three Community initiatives which have now been agreed. Northern Ireland also expects to earn further ESF receipts from the remaining six Community initiatives and the peace initiative programme which have all still to be agreed with the European Commission.

"Frameworks for the Future"

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the costs to the Government of the peace process including *(a)* cost of printing and distributing "Frameworks for the Future", *(b)* the estimated costs of the on-going talks *(c)* the estimated cost of referendums and *(d)* the estimated costs of creating and running a Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr. Ancram: On the cost of printing and distribution of "Frameworks for the Future", I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) on 2 March, *Official Report*, column *683*.

The costs of on-going talks with Northern Ireland political representatives and the Irish Government have been met from existing departmental running costs and it is not possible to isolate the costs of this particular activity.

It will only be possible to offer reliable estimates on the cost of a referendums and of creating and running an assembly when the details of the arrangements have been discussed and agreed with the relevant Northern Ireland parties.

Civil Service Pensions

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the reasons for the reclassification of civil service pensions; and if the £17 million spent on doing this will be a one-off expense.

Sir John Wheeler: The reclassification of civil service pensions arose from the decision to allocate accruing superannuation liability charges to departments' budgets with effect from the 1994–95 financial year. This was designed to make the employment costs of staff more transparent. The reclassification was a technical adjustment which has been applied throughout the United Kingdom and which had no implications for the resources available to Northern Ireland.

Environment Legislation

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what grounds the Environment Protection Act 1990 was not extended to cover Northern Ireland; and when he intends to make a statutory provision for the protection of the environment here.

Mr. Moss: When this legislation was being considered, it was decided that, as with many such matters which could be expected to fall within the competence of a devolved legislature, it would be preferable to arrange separate provision by means of Orders in Council on the Northern Ireland statute book.

Legislation broadly equivalent to the 1990 Act is currently being introduced into Northern Ireland on a phased basis. Two Orders in Council dealing with litter and genetically modified organisms are already in place and a further two relating to the major issues of waste and industrial air pollution are at an advanced stage of preparation. The provisions of the 1990 Act dealing with radioactive substances, which applied on a UK basis, have been superseded by the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much Government money was spent *(a)* in total and *(b)* on each project on the private finance initiative in (i) 1990, (ii) 1991, (iii) 1992, (iv) 1993 and (v) 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: The private finance initiative was launched by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1992. The Government contribution to projects and programmes deemed relevant to the initiative, for the financial years since launch, is as follows:

£000

Project	*1993–94*	*1994–95 Estimated Outturn*
Urban Regeneration Grant	13,290	4,760
Housing Associations	30,800	25,600
Water Executive	15	122
Hospital Equipment Leasing	238	n/a
Total	44,343	—

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the allocation of the European regional development fund to the objective 1 region of Northern Ireland for the current programming period.

Sir John Wheeler: Under the single programming document 1994 to 1999, Northern Ireland will earn 676.82 mecu, approximately £525 million, from the European regional development fund. Around 64 mecu, approximately £50 million, will also be earned through the three Community initiatives which have now been agreed. NI also expects to earn further ERDF receipts from the remaining six Community initiatives and the peace initiative programme which have all still to be agreed with the European Commission.

Road Safety

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's programme aimed at reducing the number of fatal and serious road accident casualties.

Mr. Moss: The Department of Environment (NI) is carrying forward a programme of road safety measures aimed at reducing the number of fatal and serious road accident casualties by one third by the year 2000. The main elements of the programme are as follows:

(a) *Road Safety Plan* The Department will be publishing its first plan later this year. It will set out how we will work together with other road safety bodies to achieve a one-third reduction in fatal and serious casualties by the year 2000.

(b) *Publicity Campaigns* The Department, with assistance from the private sector intends to mount two major campaigns this year on speeding and drink/driving.

(c) *Road Safety Education in Schools* The road safety education in schools will be continued although, due to resource constraints, the road safety education officer service is being reduced by approximately one third. Additional finance will be available for teaching materials. The cost of producing the annual road safety teaching aid calendar has been considerably reduced by competitive tendering, thereby improving value for money.

(d) *Road Traffic Legislation* Northern Ireland's road traffic legislation will be updated to strengthen it and also bring it more closely into line with Great Britain. The Road Traffic (NI) Order 1995 was published in January 1995 and is on target to complete its parliamentary process by mid 1995.

(e) *Accident Remedial and Traffic Calming Measures* In the last two years the Department has increased funding by 42 per cent. based on 1992–93 and 1994–95 (estimated figures). A further increase in funding of 16 per cent. is proposed for 1995–96.

(f) *Commercial Vehicle Checking Enforcement* Additional resources are being deployed to enable the Department to further strengthen its efforts to target "on-road" checking of roadworthiness and loading standards for commercial vehicles.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* the Social Security Agency, *(b)* the Training and Employment Agency, *(c)* the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (NI), *(d)* the Rate Collection Agency, *(e)* Ordnance Survey of NI, *(f)* his Department, *(g)* the Compensation Agency, *(h)* the Valuation and Land Agency (NI), *(i)* the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency and *(j)* the Child Support Agency Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* The Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland Departments and agencies monitor their absenteeism regularly.

In 1994, the Northern Ireland civil service set up an inter-departmental working group to address the problem of absenteeism at a strategic/service-wide level. The group has developed

(i) software to enable absenteeism statistics to be extracted from the main NICS non-industrial human resource database which allows all departments and agencies in NICS to produce statistics on a frequency and of a type to meet their business needs. In addition, I receive, as a standard feature, a quarterly absenteeism report on the non-industrial staff in all departments;

(ii) a policy statement on attendance, a copy of which has been issued to every member of staff. This statement not only provides the general policy on attendance but also explains the standards which are expected and the procedures to be followed when absence occurs. A copy has been placed in the Library;

(iii) notes for guidance for line managers to assist them in the implementation of the policy; and,

(iv) advice on absenteeism briefing sessions.

Against this backdrop, individual departments and agencies are now able, where appropriate, to take their own local initiatives.

The Northern Ireland Office—home civil service—also produces printouts which indicate where staff have reached set limits of sick absence. Further action includes staff counselling, the monitoring of further absences and the issue of warnings. These procedures are currently under review.

Following a review of attendance levels in early 1993, the Social Security Agency introduced a "managing attendance" programme in November 1993 with the main objective of reducing absenteeism through sickness. One of its features requires line managers to monitor absences closely and to interview staff on their return to work. It also provides for the occupational health service to be brought in to help in appropriate cases and for disciplinary action to be taken where necessary.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease aged *(a)* 65 years and over *(b)* under 65 years in Northern Ireland, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* Based on surveys of the prevalence of dementia elsewhere, it is estimated that in 1992 there were 11,500 people over 65 with dementia in Northern Ireland and some 750 people under 65 suffering from the disease. It is thought that about 70 per cent. of dementias are caused in whole or part by Alzheimer's disease.

The Department of Health and Social Services has recently undertaken a comprehensive scrutiny of its policy on dementia. The report of the scrutiny is to be published in May and a copy will be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Tayside Flood

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail as precisely as possible the assistance, both direct and indirect, given by central Government sources to the Tayside flood areas in terms of *(a)* immediate help, *(b)* assistance with temporary accommodation, *(c)* assistance with restoring permanent accommodation, *(d)* the application of the Bellwin scheme, *(e)* flood prevention measures and *(f)* other costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. George Kynoch *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The Government's immediate response to the Tayside flooding in January 1993 was to trigger the Bellwin scheme of special financial assistance to local authorities. So far, nearly £1.679 million has been paid by way of grant under the scheme to affected authorities. This is made up of £1 million to Tayside regional council, £673,229 to Perth and Kinross district council and £5,524 to Dundee district council. I expect a further payment to the regional council to be made shortly of about a further £800,000, but discussions with the regional council are still to be concluded.

Perth and Kinross district council requested supplementary capital allocations of £1.11 million in 1992–93 and this was met in full. Within these resources £910,000 was made available specifically for temporary accommodation for people made homeless by the flooding. Further housing and non-housing allocations of £1.245 million and £200,000 respectively were made available 1993–94. The allocation for housing was in respect of repair of the flood damage to council stock.

Tayside regional council was given supplementary capital allocations totalling £1.48 million in 1992–93 for expenditure on water, sewerage and other programmes, including roads and transport. This met in full the request made by the region. Further capital allocations in consequence of the flooding, totalling £700,000 were issued in 1993–94.

As a further measure, the Scottish Office contributed £110,000 towards a comprehensive flood prevention study covering the River Tay catchment area, which the regional council is currently considering with a view to the implementation of flood prevention measures.

In addition, a special scheme of grants was introduced to assist farmers with the cost of repairs to breached floodbanks. The special scheme increased the normal grant rate from 50 per cent. to 75 per cent. and was available for the period from 1 February 1993 to 30 September 1993.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the relevant data in relation to the Bellwin scheme as it applied to regional and district authorities in Tayside following the most recent floods in relation to *(a)* total amounts claimed, *(b)* total amounts paid, *(c)* per capita central government expenditure in relation to the (i) general population and (ii) flood victims, *(d)* budgetary heads of claims, *(e)* items claimed but refused, *(f)* items claimed by reduced and *(g)* items which could have been claimed but which were not; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Following the severe flooding in Tayside in January 1993, claims under the Bellwin scheme were received from three councils. Tayside regional council and Perth and Kinross district council have received interim payments of grant. The relevant figures for all councils are shown in the table: the figures for grant claimed are net of the threshold for each authority and are based on the normal grant rate of 85 per cent.

Authority	*Grant Claimed* £	*Grant paid to date* £
Tayside regional council	2,464,760	1,000,000 (interim)
Perth and Kinross district council	791,451	673,229 (interim)
Dundee district council	128,790	5,524 (final)
Total	3,385,001	1,678,753

Since the claim from Tayside region is yet to be finally settled, it is not possible to give per capita figures for expenditure, but it must be doubtful if such figures would be meaningful given the nature of the flooding.

The claims have been assessed on the basis of the normal Bellwin scheme rules. These are set out in Scottish Office finance circular 6/1990, a copy of which is in the Library.

I am not aware of there being any items of expenditure for which Bellwin grant could have been claimed but which the local authorities chose not to include in their claims. My officials have had lengthy discussions with the authorities concerned both before and after claims were submitted, and these discussions included guidance on what expenditure would and would not in principle be eligible for grant.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the advice provided to him by the Scottish Enterprise Board on his consultation paper regarding the review of local enterprise company boundaries;

(2) when he will publish his views on the consultation paper regarding the review of local enterprise company boundaries.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend will make known his decision on local enterprise company boundaries in due course, after he has received and considered the views of the Scottish Enterprise Board.

Nursing Home Bids

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many private nursing home beds there were in each health board area in Scotland as a whole in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1993–94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 March 1995]:* The information on private nursing home[1] beds is as follows:

Health Board	[2]*1987*	*1994*
Argyll and Clyde	633	1,150
Ayrshire and Arran	670	2,064
Borders	180	723
Dumfries and Galloway	52	494
Fife	45	795
Forth Valley	207	860
Grampian	324	1,761
Greater Glasgow	626	2,299
Highland	292	1,009
Lanarkshire	541	2,181
Lothian	965	2,242
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	140	1,609
Western Isles	—	65
Total	4,675	17,252

Notes:[1]

Private nursing homes and hospitals subject to the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, as amended.

[2] The first year in which comparable information was centrally available.

Urban Programme

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which geographic areas in Scotland are eligible to receive urban programme support in 1995–96; and how many enumeration districts within these areas are in the worst 10 per cent. based on the analysis of the 1991 census data.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am arranging for the information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease aged *(a)* 65 years and over or *(b)* under 65 years in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* This information is not available. The range of estimates which may be adduced from specific studies of the prevalence of dementia in the population is discussed in an article by Dr. P. W. Brooks which appeared in the March 1992 edition of the "Health Bulletin", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Lanark Blue Cheese

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Lanark blue cheese, setting out the United Kingdom and EC legal instruments governing its production and what assessment he has made of the application of the relevant legislation in France as respects French cheeses.

Sir Hector Monro: The hygienic production of cheese is regulated at present by the Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 1959 as amended and by the provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990. All existing milk and dairies legislation is being consolidated into a new set of regulations which will also implement the EC milk hygiene directive 92/46/EEC.

Although as Minister I have no involvement with proceedings which have been instituted, I understand that on 6 March 1995 a justice of the peace approved an application by the food authority for the destruction of some Lanark blue cheese, that an interim interdict to halt that destruction has subsequently been granted to the manufacturer and that the matter is now before the courts.

My right hon. Friend has no information on which he can base an assessment of the application of legislation in France as respects French cheeses.

Discovery Project

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date approval was given to provide public funds from the Scottish Office budget for the tourist-related capital project at Discovery point, Dundee; and which Government Department or agency was responsible for approving the project.

Mr. Kynoch: Financial assistance was provided to the Discovery project from the Scottish tourist board and Scottish Enterprise Tayside. The provision of that assistance was in both cases within the delegated authority of the body concerned, and the question of Scottish Office approval did not therefore arise.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the value of public funds which have been spent on building the Discovery centre, Dundee; and if he will list the Government and local government share of these funds.

Mr. Kynock: The information requested is not held centrally.

Homelessness

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in rural areas in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of households accepted as homeless by rural local authorities is set out in the table. Rural authorities are as defined in the "Scottish Economic Bulletin" in 1985.

Operation of the homeless persons legislation households accepted as being homeless in rural areas

Year	*Total number accepted*
1979–80	1,821
1980–81	1,556
1981–82	1,810
1982–83	1,843
1983–84	1,946
1984–85	2,132
1985–86	2,209
1986–87	2,487
1987–88	2,606
1988–89	2,782
1989–90	3,243
1990–91	3,800
1991–92	4,478
1992–93	5,058

Tourism

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes have been made to the statutory provision for public support towards tourist-related capital projects with the transfer of responsibility from the Scottish tourist board to Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. Kynoch: None.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list by name and value tourist-related capital projects in Tayside in the last five years; and which Government body approved the projects;

(2) how many tourist-related capital projects in East Perthshire have received public support in the last five years.

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested relates to operational matters for the Scottish tourist board and Scottish Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of those bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the total cost to public funds of tourist-related capital projects in Tayside by funds under the control of Scottish Enterprise Tayside.

Mr. Kynoch: This is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise. I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the statutory power for tourist-related capital projects was transferred from the Scottish tourist board to Scottish Enterprise Tayside; and what impact this had on projects under consideration by the Scottish tourist board.

Mr. Kynoch: The Secretary of State and HM Treasury approved the suspension of the arrangements for the giving of financial assistance under section 4(1)a of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 with effect from 29 June 1993. Those completed applications for assistance received by the Scottish tourist board on or prior to that date were considered by the board and approved or rejected in accordance with the provisions of the scheme. Incomplete applications held by the board on that date or those applications received after that date were passed to the relevant local enterprise companies.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many inquiries he has received about tourist-related capital projects which have been affected by the change from Scottish tourist board approval to Scottish Enterprise Tayside approval.

Mr. Kynoch: The only inquiries on this matter received by my right hon. Friend have been those made by the hon. Member.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sites of special scientific interest have been *(a)* damaged and *(b)* destroyed by (i) development and (ii) other means in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Sir Hector Monro: Details of damage to sites of special scientific interest are published in the annual reports of Scottish Natural Heritage and the former Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and Nature Conservancy Council, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Hedgerows

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what length of hedgerow has been lost in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Sir Hector Monro: Reliable estimates of hedgerow loss are not available in the form requested.

As part of the work on its national countryside monitoring scheme, Scottish Natural Heritage will be producing, by the end of 1995, further Scottish estimates for the period 1970 to 1988.

Forestry Commission Land

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of Forestry Commission *(a)* land and *(b)* woodland has been sold off in (i) England, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Wales in each year since 1979; and what area he now proposes for future sales.

Sir Hector Monro: The information is given in the table.

Year ended 31 March	All land (hectares)	Forestry land (hectares)
England		
1980	[1]—	300
1981	414	189
1982	1,309	676
1983	2,523	2,126
1984	4,680	4,025
1985	6,976	6,561
1986	2,789	2,489
1987	2,786	2,377
1988	4,593	4,108
1989	1,629	1,386
1990	1,989	1,824
1991	1,556	1,452
1992	1,737	1,673
1993	1,006	883
1994	1,171	1,091
Scotland		
1980	[1]—	300
1981	1,465	368
1982	7,371	1,510
1983	8,135	4,061
1984	36,543	11,345
1985	18,359	7,671
1986	10,555	4,055
1987	6,220	2,674
1988	3,359	1,662
1989	4,286	1,716
1990	4,620	2,633
1991	4,754	2,384
1992	3,517	3,359
1993	8,437	4,930
1994	12,462	12,105
Wales		
1980	[1]—	0
1981	361	131
1982	1,743	161
1983	1,450	445
1984	3,347	1,137
1985	3,522	1,840
1986	3,229	1,770
1987	1,950	1,135
1988	977	617
1989	1,760	1,226
1990	1,242	1,102
1991	1,118	934
1992	1,657	1,231
1993	1,146	1,014
1994	1,317	1,223

[1] Before 1980 central records were kept only of forestry land.

As announced in the Government's expenditure plans 1995–96 to 1997–98, the commission plans to sell 15,000 hectares of forest land in Britain in each of the next three years.

WALES

Heart Disease

16. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made towards the eradication of premature deaths caused by coronary heart disease in Wales.

Mr. Richards: The death rate from coronary heart disease for people aged under 65 decreased from 92 to 60 per 100,000 between 1985, when Heartbeat Wales was established, and 1992 the latest year for which figures are available. This extremely encouraging change has taken place against a background of reduced smoking prevalence among adults and other improvements in lifestyles.

Welsh Medium Education

19. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to encourage the provision of Welsh medium secondary schools in Wales.

Mr. Richards: The pattern and level of Welsh medium provision is primarily a matter for local education authorities in fulfilment of their statutory duties. Authorities' proposals for Welsh medium education should be considered when they draw up schemes under the Welsh Language Act 1994, and they should take into account parental wishes when doing so.

South Wales Electricity

20. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet the chairman of South Wales Electricity to discuss the future of the company.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend will be meeting the chairman on 20 March.

Exports

21. **Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for stimulating Welsh exports in the coming months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office's programme of trade missions and trade fair representation continues to give small and medium-sized companies in Wales the opportunity to join sales missions to markets throughout the world. Visits will be made to 13 markets over the next 12 months and some of these will be led by Ministers. Representations will also be offered at trade fairs in Dubai and Kuala Lumpar.

Welsh Office staff will continue to mount seminars, workshops and other events and visit new and existing exporters to provide advice and information.

Youth Training Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what public funds he has devoted to training the people aged 25 years and under in order to get them out of unemployment in each of the last five years.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* Figures covering youth training, youth credits and modern apprenticeships are given in the following table. These programmes are specifically aimed at people under 25 years of age. In addition, adult training schemes are available to people over 18 but figures are not available for expenditure on those aged 18 to 25 within these schemes.

Provision has fluctuated over the period concerned in line with demand and changes to the programmes. Reductions in the numbers of 16-year-olds and increases in the proportion staying on at school or entering further education have caused demand to reduce since 1991–92.

Funding has always been more than adequate to meet the youth guarantee by providing training and those young people up to the age of 18 who have required it; and 18 to 25-year-olds are treated as a priority group under the adult training for work programme.

Youth training, youth credits and modern apprenticeships provision in Wales

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	42.252
1991–92	48.897
1992–93	42.683
1993–94	40.424
1994–95	49.421

Notes:
[1]Figures for first four years represent outturn expenditure; that for 1994–95 is the level of provision available.
[2] Youth credits commenced in 1991–92 on a pilot basis and are now being progressively introduced by training and enterprise councils throughout Wales. Modern apprenticeships were introduced in 1994–95.

Cardiff Bay Advisory Committee

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the setting up of the Cardiff Bay advisory committee: what representations he has had concerning the delays in *(a)* choosing the members of the committee and *(b)* commencing its activities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* The establishment of the Cardiff Bay advisory committee is the statutory responsibility of the Cardiff Bay development corporation.

I understand that nominations have been received from the 12 organisations selected to be represented on the committee and that the first meeting will take place later this year.

Car Parking

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has given to hospital trusts and health authorities in relation to charging for the provision of car parking for the disabled for both out-patients and emergency admissions; and when this guidance was last reviewed.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* None. Charging for car parking on hospital sites is an operational matter for local management.

NHS Trust Funding

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make increased funding available to Powys Health Care NHS trust for 1995–96 and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Responsibility for purchasing health service from NHS trusts rests with health authorities and GP fundholding practices.

Class Sizes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average class size in Wales for the school years *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94, *(d)* 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood: The following table shows the average class size in Wales for both primary and secondary schools. Data are not available for 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Average class size as at (a)	*September 1991*	*September 1992*	*January 1994*
Primary schools	25.0	25.0	25.6
Secondary schools	21.5	21.4	20.1

(a) Average class size is calculated as the number of pupils divided by the number of classes. In the case of primary schools, the number of classes used is the number of registered classes whereas for secondary schools it is the number of classes in which the pupils were taught during a specified period on the day of the schools' census.
Source:
schools census.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the change, in real terms, of standard spending assessment per pupil for Wales in *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood: There are no standard spending assessments for education, or per pupil, for Welsh authorities.

The standard spending assessments for county councils in Wales, published in "The Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1995–96", include provision for education.

Waiting Times

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to issue figures relating to the waiting times for routine out-patient waits; longest in-patient waits and combined waits for South Glamorgan health authority as at 31 December 1994, comparable with the information given for all other health authorities in the waiting times information bulletin, February 1995 edition, issued by Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: As reported in the bulletin, hospitals in south Glamorgan have agreed to provide information on all the medical procedures involved for the next edition.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultants have been omitted from the schedule published in the Welsh Health Common Services Authority waiting times information bulletin of February for reasons of inability to comply with the current patients charter guarantees on maximum in-patient waiting times.

Mr. Redwood: Three consultants were not included in the February edition of the waiting times information bulletin.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for circulation of the operational guidance on the total waiting times guarantee, and what consultations he has had with the community health councils, local authorities and patient representatives

concerning the form and circulation of the guidance document.

Mr. Redwood: The operational guidance on total waiting times will be distributed widely within the NHS in Wales, with copies being sent to all general practices, hospitals, health authorities and community health councils.

Comments on the draft were sought from all community health councils in Wales, and community health council representatives attended workshops arranged to discuss practical aspects of the new approach to reducing hospital waiting times.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of when the next issue of waiting times information, given 31 March waiting time, will be published.

Mr. Redwood: The next edition of the waiting times information bulletin will be distributed to general practitioners in the first week of May. It will contain information gathered from hospitals in the last week of March 1995.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has given the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the inclusion of consultants in the waiting times information bulletin who are on extended leave of absence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: No specific guidance has been given on this point.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the draft operational guidance relating to the total waiting time guarantee to be effective from April; what representations he has had from health authorities, family health service authorities and trusts in relation to the form of the final guidance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: A copy of the operational guidance on total waiting times will be placed in the Library. It incorporates helpful comments made by health authorities, hospitals, general practitioners and community health councils.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the inclusion of consultants in the schedule published in the waiting times information bulletin, who cannot meet current patients charter guarantees on maximum waiting times.

Mr. Redwood: One representation from an NHS general manager has been received, and in the light of this we are considering including details of all consultants in future editions.

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions and for what length of time the contract tender period for the market-testing competition for the cardiac surgery unit to Morriston hospital was extended, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The original contract tender period of 150 days was extended three times to 1 December 1994, 28 February 1995 and 14 March 1995.

Valleys Initiative

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the schemes under way as part of his valleys private finance initiative.

Mr. Redwood: All 20 sites contained in the "Investment Opportunities in the South Wales Valleys" portfolio are actively being marketed by the Welsh Development Agency and the Land Authority for Wales.

Detailed development briefs for Victoria, Navigation park, Llantarnam, Penllergaer, Parc Hendre and South Llanelli will be available from the Welsh development agency at the end of March.

Briefs for Hirwaun, Cwm Cynon, Mamhilad and the Merthyr Tydfil BR sites will be available in May or June.

Expressions of interest have been received from developers for the schemes at Brackla, Port Talbot, Ynysallan, Llantarnam, Mamhilad, South Llanelli and Merthyr Tydfil, and work is well under way at Victoria to create the new urban village.

NHS Staff Eating Disorders

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to health authorities and trusts giving employment of nurses or nursing assistants who are, or have suffered from anorexia nervosa, bulimia or other eating disorders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Guidance on such issues are included in occupational health service guidance letters which are sent out by the Department to all health authorities and NHS trusts in Wales. The most recent guidance letter, DGM(95)13, was issued in February this year and, as a result of the Allitt inquiry—Clothier report—included a paragraph about pre-employment health assessments of staff with a history of behaviour that might give cause for concern. I am placing a copy in the Library of the House.

Building Signs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about his plans to make it a requirement of Welsh Office funding that signs are erected, or promotional material made available, publicising the source of funding; how much money he will make available to fund such publicity; and from what budget this money will come.

Mr. Redwood: I should like the Welsh dragon to appear on construction signboards where the Welsh Office has contributed significant funding, and have asked my officials to draw up proposals to give effect to this policy. Money is already spent on signboards at each site from project funds.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest have been *(a)* damaged and *(b)* destroyed by development and other means in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Gwilym Jones.: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. However, since the establishment of the Countryside Council for Wales on 1 April 1991 this data has been included in its annual reports. Prior to 1992 it was collated centrally for England, Scotland and Wales, by Nature Conservancy Council and was published in its annual reports. The

annual reports of both organisations are in the Library of the House.

Hedgerows

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what length of hedgerow has been lost in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Gwilym Jones.: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on Monday 6 February *Official Report,* column *94.*

Housing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has made of the extent of unmet housing need; and if he will make it his policy to collate figures on unmet housing need so as to qualify the requirements for *(a)* new housebuilding and *(b)* renovation activity.

Mr. Redwood: For the whole of Wales I have estimates of house condition, population growth and household formation. However it is the responsibility of local authorities to assess housing need in their areas. They are best placed to decide priorities, taking account of local factors, and to devise strategies drawing in developers, housing associations and others to meet housing need.

Prescriptions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion and what number of prescriptions dispensed in Wales were written in Welsh in 1993–94; and what has been the change in the proportion of prescriptions written in Welsh in the last five years.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not available centrally. Prescriptions are communications between professionals in the NHS and may be dispensed in any part of the United Kingdom. For this reason the British National Formulary states that they should be completed in English, although some Latin abbreviations are acceptable.

TRANSPORT

Railway Track Maintenance

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that Railtrack maintains the same level of maintenance on main and branch line track, including track renewal, re-sleepering and re-ballasting, for 1995–96 as for 1993–94 and 1994–95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack operates within a regulatory and contractual framework, overseen by the rail regulator, which sets high standards of safety and performance for the rail network. Within that framework it is for Railtrack to determine the appropriate level of track maintenance and renewal necessary to meet the standards to which it is subject.

US-UK Aviation Relations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report,* column *4,* on what date he visited Her Majesty's ambassador in Washington; what was the purpose of his visit; and which officials accompanied him.

Dr. Mawhinney: I visited Her Majesty's ambassador in Washington, unaccompanied by officials, on September 23 1994 to discuss US-UK aviation relations.

Vehicle Emissions

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to encourage the use of particulate emission control in heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Particulate emissions control has been a requirement of all new heavy duty goods vehicles and PSVs since 1 October 1993 by virtue of directive 91/542/EEC. This same directive applies further restrictions to apply to all vehicles registered from 1 October 1996. The Department is also working with the Commission to develop yet further controls from 1 October 1999.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what research his department is currently undertaking in respect of particulate pollution; and at what cost.

Mr. Norris: Research into air pollution is a matter for the Department of the Environment. Complementary research undertaken by the Department of Transport includes a £1 million joint study, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment and the motor industry, into means of identifying and analysing particulates by size and composition, and establishing typical levels emitted by petrol and diesel vehicles. A second £1.1 million departmental programme, aimed at improving control of particulate emissions from new heavy duty diesel vehicles, is developing an EC type approval test more representative of typical driving conditions. These programmes are in addition to others aimed at improved modelling—£225,000, and data collection—£200,000 per annum on-going, for better forecasting of all transport fleet emissions, including particulates.

Radioactive Materials

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1995, *Official Report,* column *597,* if he will give reasons for the delay in introducing regulations arising from the Radioactive Materials (Road Transport) Act 1991.

Mr. Norris: The matters to be dealt with in the regulations are of a complex nature and it was necessary to resolve a large number of technical details.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on vehicles carrying plutonium along the M6 and M40 on or around 23 February; if he will investigate them; and what assessment he has made of whether vehicle registration H254 FGM complied with road traffic regulations at all times.

Mr. Norris: I have received no such representations. If I receive any, I shall consider them. I have not made such an assessment of the vehicle referred to.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report,*

column 597, what effect the deletion of a higher executive officer post in the radioactive material transportation division has had on the work of that division; and what reorganisation has taken place.

Mr. Norris: The tasks of the post holder are being undertaken by other members of the division. The administrative branch of RMTD is now headed by an executive officer.

Orbital Motorway, Birmingham

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make a further announcement on the progress of his plans for a tolled western orbital motorway around Birmingham; and whether he intends this road to be shadow-tolled.

Mr. Watts: There are no plans for a tolled wester orbital motorway around Birmingham. The Highways Agency is continuing preparatory work for a scheme which might prove suitable for private sector finance through the design, build, finance and operate initiative.

I expect to make a further announcement about progress on the scheme in due course.

Diesel Fuel

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what proposals he has to introduce incentives to increase the availability of sulphur-free diesel fuel.

Mr. Norris: None.

Oceanic Programme and Scottish Centre

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he now expects to make an announcement in respect of the Oceanic programme; and on what date he expects the new capability to commence;

(2) when he expects to make an announcement in respect of the new Scottish centre; and on what date he expects the new facility to be available.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on 12 December 1994. There are no plans at present to make an announcement on the new Scottish centre, or on the new Oceanic flight data processing system.

M62 Relief Road

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make a further announcement of the progress of his plans for the M62 relief road in northern Manchester.

Mr. Watts: On 22 June 1994, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) announced further studies of the M62, which are now in progress. The studies are expected to take about two years to complete and their estimated cost is between £3 million and £5 million.

London Underground (Safety)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made into researching the potential development of the remote reversal of escalators to effect rapid evacuation of passengers from underground stations.

Mr. Norris: I understand that Her Majesty's railway inspectorate has commissioned a research project into this subject from the health and safety laboratory in Sheffield.

Safer Cycling

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the research projects currently being funded by his Department to promote safer cycling; and what is the budget for each research project.

Mr. Norris: The Department is currently funding the following research projects to promote safer cycling:

Title	*£'000*
Vulnerable Road Users	378
Innovative Cycle Schemes	240
Toucan Crossings and Cyclists	170
Cycle Helmets	137
Cycle Training	105

Illegal Operations Working Group

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what dates the illegal operations working group has met in the last 12 months; and what recommendations it has published.

Mr. Norris: The Department's illegal operations working group met on 25 August 1994 and 7 February 1995.

The working group's 1994 report is being drafted and will be circulated to those organisations with an interest in goods vehicle enforcement.

Train Skids

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases of trains skidding while in the course of braking have been recorded in each of he last 10 years; and how many in each year involved turbo trains.

Mr. Watts: Train skids are not statutorily reportable occurrences unless they cause an accident or dangerous occurrence, such as a buffer stop collision. Statistics on reportable incidents are published in Her Majesty's railway inspectorate's annual report on the safety record of the railways, copies of which are placed in the Library of the House.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many clerical staff within the Vehicle Inspectorate are currently undertaking traffic examiner duties on temporary promotion;

(2) how many tachographs were examined by the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of he last 12 months; and how many prosecutions resulted from these checks;

(3) how many spot checks on vehicles were undertaken by the Vehicle Inspectorate at the ports of Dover, Hull, Felixstowe and Liverpool; and how many traffic examiners were stationed at each port in each of the last five years;

(4) how many vehicles were weighed by the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of the last 12 months; and how many prosecutions resulted from those checks;

(5) how many vehicles were examined at vehicle spot checks by the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of the last 12 months; and how many prosecutions resulted from these checks.

Mr. Norris: There are operational matters for the Vehicle Inspectorate Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Ms Joan Walley, dated 13 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning various enforcement activities within the Agency for each of the last 12 months.

There are currently 2 clerical staff undertaking traffic examiner duties on temporary promotion. The posts are scheduled to be trawled and filled on substantive promotion in the near future.

Details of the number of tachograph examined, total number of roadworthiness spot checks and number of vehicles weighed in each of the last 12 months are shown in the attached annexes. Current details for the information on prosecutions is not available in the form requested. However, for 1993/94 there were 4,422 successful prosecutions for drivers hours offences, 5,521 for overloading offences and 5,620 other traffic offences. We have recently centralised and refined the handling of prosecution work within the Agency. This will improve the collection and availability of data.

The road transport enforcement work within the Inspectorate is broadly divided into 23 geographical "Areas" I have provided details of traffic examiner checks at or in the approaches of harbours for the areas in which Dover (Area 14), Hull (Area 21), Felixstowe (Area 17) and Liverpool (Area 6) are based. The figures include checks made at all harbours within the area, we do not have separate figures for each port. Traffic examiners are required to work throughout the area and are not "stationed" to work exclusively at the ports. The current numbers of traffic examiners for these 4 "Areas" are.

	Number of traffic examiners
Area 6	7
Area 14	10
Area 17	6
Area 21	5

Roadside spot checks February 1994 to January 1995

	PSV	*HGV*	*LGV*
February	2,348	9,740	3,477
March	1,601	6,520	2,104
April	1,467	11,505	2,522
May	2,140	12,834	3,349
June	2,435	10,578	3,375
July	3,821	14,277	4,682
August	2,619	10,982	4,153
September	2,673	12,296	7,905
October	2,482	12,080	4,645
November	2,758	10,622	6,483
December	2,473	8,860	5,892
January	2,534	6,773	7,495

Monthly checking of tachographs and weighing of vehicles

	HGV tachos	*PSV tachos*
1994		
February	138,153	10,700
March	133,503	32,294
April	107,742	9,404
May	110,981	13,620
June	107,256	21,197
July	153,115	34,037
August	123,186	29,488
September	129,186	28,430
October	123,170	21,755
November	121,916	16,204
December	110,818	21,751
1995		
January	94,882	14,277
Total	1,454,570	253,167

Total tachographs (12 months) = 1,707,737

Monthly weighing of vehicles

	HGV weighings	*PSV weighings*	*Light goods weighings*
1994			
February	8,549	31	411
March	9,594	70	580
April	6,905	90	428
May	6,797	145	487
June	6,904	210	467
July	9,183	444	576
August	7,573	231	523
September	10,474	124	642
October	18,863	52	584
November	22,907	62	561
December	18,371	89	674
1995			
January	6,106	12	557
Total	132,226	1,560	5,690

Total weighings (12 months) = 140,476

Vehicle examination (including weighing) at harbours, within selected enforcement areas

	April	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*Total for 10 months*
Area 6											
HGV	104	105	74	85	203	69	220	215	57	16	1,148
Light goods	134	136	100	120	282	85	309	280	74	19	1,539
PSV	0	0	5	14	0	6	0	4	0	0	29
	238	241	179	219	485	160	529	499	131	35	2,716
Area 14											
HGV	205	282	346	428	267	503	618	917	599	664	4,829
Light goods	327	450	500	655	381	690	791	1,098	707	906	6,505
PSV	55	90	72	48	37	163	81	90	86	71	793
	587	822	918	1,131	685	1,356	1,490	2,105	1,392	1,641	12,127

Vehicle examination (including weighing) at harbours, within selected enforcement areas

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	Total for 10 months
Area 17											
HGV	958	892	776	1,442	814	1,022	1,676	2,180	515	1,001	11,276
Light goods	1,458	1,410	1,187	1,972	11,28	1,104	1,703	2,193	525	1,348	14,028
PSV	26	31	25	36	18	17	0	3	0	0	156
	2,442	2,333	1,988	3,450	1,960	2,143	3,379	4,376	1,040	2,349	25,460
Area 21											
HGV	978	705	331	467	125	200	116	41	146	5	3,114
Light goods	1,150	826	397	554	132	228	118	43	147	5	3,600
PSV	210	165	0	0	29	128	17	107	16	0	672
	2,338	1,696	728	1,021	286	556	251	191	309	10	7,386

Night Flying Restrictions

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what review he has carried out of the night restrictions which currently apply at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports following the recent judicial review; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Since the judgment of 20 December. I have given very careful consideration to the night flying restrictions which were announced on 6 May last year. The Government recognise the need to ensure that local communities are not exposed to excessive levels of aircraft noise at night. We have decided not to propose any changes. This fulfils the Government's intention of keeping noise levels at Heathrow and Gatwick below those permitted in summer 1988.

The new consultation paper explains more fully what was meant in paragraph 34 of the original consultation paper of January 1993, to meet a point which was challenged in the High Court.

The consultation paper is being widely circulated to Members of Parliament, local authorities and environmental groups, as well as to the aviation industry. The Department is asking for comments on the proposals by 9 May; a copy has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Additionally, I am writing to the chief executive of BAA plc to ask him to consider carefully whether there is more that BAA or the airlines can do on a voluntary basis to reduce disturbance caused by night flights.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Merthyr/Rhymney/Cynon benefit district who are over the age of 58 years; and who will be exempt from the changes on the grounds of severe disability.

Mr. Hague: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 9 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about Invalidity Benefit (IVB) recipients in the Benefits Agency's Merthyr/Rhymney/Cynon district.

All customers over the age of 58 on 13 April 1995 who have been continuously in receipt of IVB since 1 December 1993 will be automatically exempted from the new all work test for Incapacity Benefit.

An estimate has been made using information derived from a statistically valid sample obtained by computeer scrutiny of IVB caseloads on 21 January 1995.

The estimate of the number of people in the Merthyr/Rhymney/Cynon area in receipt of IVB over the age of 58 who will be exempt from the new all work test is 3,360.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving invalidity benefit in the Merthyr/Cynon/Rhymney benefit district; what percentage this is of the total population of working age; and what are the average percentages for *(a)* the Welsh and *(b)* the English and Welsh averages.

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the table.

People in receipt of invalidity benefit and percentage of working population

	People in receipt of invalidity benefit	[3]Percentage of the working population
Merthyr/Cynon/Rhymney district	[1]23,834	17
Wales	[2]172,000	10
England	[2]1,184,000	4
England and Wales	[2]1,356,000	4

Notes:

[1]Figure obtained from a 100 per cent clerical count of cases in the Benefits Agency offices on the last working day of January 1995. The figure will include some people who have claimed but are not actually receiving invalidity benefit because they are in receipt of a higher overlapping benefit.

[2] Invalidity benefit recipients at 3 April 1993, based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand.

[3] The working population has been taken to be 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women. Estimated mid-year population figures supplied by the population estimates unit, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Child Support

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many absent parents are paying the minimum weekly contribution towards child maintenance; and what proportion of assessments this figure represents.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 9 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State or Social Security about the number of minimum weekly contributions to child maintenance and the proportion of the number of child maintenance assessments made by the Child Support Agency this represents.

Information available following a sampling exercise of Child Support Agency cases conducted in October 1994, shows that 48,800 cases, 16 per cent. of assessments completed at that time, were assessed for the absent parent to pay the minimum weekly contribution. Information on the number of such cases where maintenance was actually being paid is not available.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what proportion of Child Support Agency cases where an assessment has been made no child maintenance has been paid; and what action he has taken.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 9 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the proportion of cases where no maintenance has been paid following an assessment by the Child Support Agency.

As at the 3 February 1995 the Agency was dealing with a total of 179,000 accounts that had been set up for the collection of maintenance through the Agency collection service, following the completion of a maintenance assessment. In 42 per cent. of those cases no maintenance had yet been paid. Of course, a number of these accounts have only recently been set up, but of the remainder, interim maintenance assessments (IMA) have been made against the majority of the absent parents who have not met their obligation to pay child maintenance. Enforcement action will be considered against absent parents who still do not pay after the issue of an IMA.

The Agency continually reviews its accounting procedures to ensure that where a child maintenance assessment has been made and collection requested, that maintenance is collected. It has introduced a number of management action and implemented specially designed work packages to secure the collection of the maximum amount of maintenance.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the average reduction in the amount of child support bills caused by the changes announced in February 1994 and January 1995.

Mr. Burt: It was estimated that, for those absent parents who were affected by the February 1994 changes, the average reduction in maintenance would be £5 to £10 per week. For those who will be affected by the changes to the formula proposed in the recent White Paper, "Improving Child Support", the average reduction in maintenance is expected to be some £8. Any reductions due to the proposed departure system will be in addition to this.

Figures for average reductions do not indicate the range of reductions, which can vary significantly depending on the circumstances of individual cases.

Young People

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to simplify the procedure by which young people can claim severe hardship payments;

(2) if he will instruct the Benefits Agency to improve the availability of information relating to young people's benefit entitlement and ensure that it is placed in locations which young people use, including schools, colleges and youth clubs;

(3) if he will instruct the Benefits Agency to ensure that *(a)* all staff are aware of young people's entitlement to claim for severe hardship payments and *(b)* young people are informed of this entitlement when they ask about benefits;

(4) what plans he has to ensure that compulsory training for Benefits Agency staff is enforced.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 9 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the availability of information and procedures for young people who wish to claim benefits.

Every Benefit Agency (BA) District Office is required to have a nominated benefit manager with responsibility for service delivery to 16–17 year olds. All local office staff have been made aware of young people's right to claim severe hardship payments and staff dealing with claims from 16–17 year olds will have completed specialist training. In addition, staff holding a Certificate of Authority from the Secretary of State to make severe hardship directions to pay Income Support, will have undertaken further specialist training in the handling of claims from young people.

A handbook "Income Support for 16–17 year olds", a copy of which is in the Library, is available in all offices. This details the procedures to be followed and contains a section on best practices. One of the recommendations is that offices set up local liaison groups with other Agencies and outside bodies with an interest in the welfare of 16–17 year olds. Many of these groups exist and work well to resolve local difficulties.

Consideration is being given to simplifying the process for claiming payments under the severe hardship provision from April 1996 through the delivery of the new benefit Job Seekers Allowance.

The BA is always looking at ways of improving its targeting of information. We are currently reviewing how the BA targets its main customer groups and the distribution of information to them.

Currently there are two leaflets specifically for young people. These are FB23 "Young people's guide to Social Security" and IS26 "Income Support if you are 16 or 17". I have enclosed copies of the leaflets, which are also in the Library.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Housing Benefit, Scotland

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the cost to the housing benefit bill in Scotland would be of *(a)* reducing the housing benefit taper to 50 per cent. and *(b)* increasing the earnings disregard for single people to £10 per week and for couples to £25 per week based upon the 1993–94 distribution.

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated cost of *(a)* changing the housing benefit taper to 50 per cent. is £50 million, and *(b)* changing the earnings disregards to £10 a week for single people and £25 for couples is £15 million.

Notes:

1. Based on data taken from the 1990–91–92 Family Expenditure Surveys modelled at 1994–95 prices and benefit levels.

2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £5 million.

3. For the earnings disregard, disabled couples are assumed to be entitled to the new couples disregard rather than the disabled person's disregard of £15.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many applicants for disability living allowance seek a review of their case after rejection of first consideration by his Department;

(2) how many applicants for disability living allowance who have failed to get their application accepted on first consideration or on review then appeal to his Department;

(3) how many applications for disability living allowance are granted following an application for a review of a refusal by his Department;

(4) how many disability living allowance applications have been granted on first consideration by his Department;

(5) how many applications for disability living allowance are granted on appeal by his Department.

Mr. Hague: The information requested about awards on claims, reviews and appeals for disability living allowance is not available in the form requested. The available information is in the table. An award on review or appeal may be the result of a variety of factors, such as a deterioration in the claimant's condition or the provision of additional information.

Disability living allowance

February 1992–January 1995	[1]*Numbers (thousand)*
New awards[2]	845
Reviews received[3] (within three months)	299
Reviews received[3] (outside three months)	336
Successful reviews[4]	277
Appeals received	59
Successful appeals[4]	24

Source:
Analytical Services Division (100 per cent. data).

Notes:
[1]A claimant may apply for a review or appeal against an award as well as a rejection. The figures quoted are for all applications for review and appeal.
[2]New awards are awards on initial claims only and not on review or appeal.
[3]There will be registered reviews and appeals which have not yet reached the decision stage of the review or appeal system.
[4]Successful reviews and appeals are those where DLA was allowed for the first time, another component was awarded or the rate(s) payable increased.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to amend the regulations for industrial injury benefit to take account of carpal tunnel syndrome.

Mr. Hague: Carpal tunnel syndrome in association with the use of hand-held vibrating tools is already included in the list of prescribed diseases for industrial injuries disablement benefit purposes (prescribed disease A12).

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed jobseeker's legislation on actors and performers.

Mr. Roger Evans: It is appropriate that unemployed actors and performers will have to satisfy the same conditions of entitlement for jobseeker's allowance as other jobseekers.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if the new contribution linking arrangements for jobseeker's allowance will take account of the period when a carer is unable to claim invalid care allowance because the disabled person is still within the six or three-month waiting period for attendance allowance and disability living allowance;

(2) what will be the position of ex-carers who had *(a)* an underlying entitlement to invalid care allowance or *(b)* a broken record of receipt of invalid care allowance or underlying entitlement with regard to the new contribution linking arrangements for ex-carers who wish to claim jobseeker's allowance.

Mr. Roger Evans: Periods in receipt of invalid care allowance will be included in the linking provisions for contributions-based jobseeker's allowance. The precise details of this arrangement, including the position of carers in cases where a disabled person is serving a qualifying period, are still under consideration.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the size of the Treasury grant to the national insurance fund in 1993–94 and 1994–95; what estimate he has made for grants in each of the next three years; and to what extent these grants are to cover the subsidy being paid to state earnings-related pension scheme contributors transferring into private pension schemes.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Treasury grant to the national insurance fund was £7,589 million in 1993–94 and £6,280 million in 1994–95. For 1995–96 the percentage grant now set by order will amount to a maximum of £4,075 million. The level of Treasury grant for future years will be set at the appropriate time and will depend on the estimated income and outgo of the fund then. Estimates are not therefore available for later years, but working assumptions suggest that the grant could fall to £2.3 billion by 1997–98.

The Treasury grant is a general contribution to the national insurance fund and is not attributed to any particular aspect of the fund's expenditure, of which the rebates to providers of approved personal pension is just one.

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what basis he arrived at the figure

for the maximum amount allowed for funeral payments from the social fund.

Mr. Roger Evans: The proposed cap for social fund funeral payments is based on the average funeral payment award for 1993–94.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for his Department's exceptions to the capping of funeral payments under the social fund for instances of special needs with special reference to the weight, size and height of the deceased, pacemaker removal and out-of-hours removals.

Mr. Roger Evans: The proposed cap on social fund funeral payments of £875 is intended to be a sum sufficient to meet the costs of a straightforward funeral which is dignified and respectful, or to make a very substantial contribution towards it. It is not intended to meet the cost of all variations and eventualities.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how *(a)* funeral directors and *(b)* others will be kept informed of procedures following the capping of funeral payments under the social fund.

Mr. Roger Evans: I shall be writing to the funeral directors' associations. Advice will be made available locally through revised forms and leaflets. District offices will be encouraged to liaise with local funeral directors.

Incapacity Benefit (Laryngectomees)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will discuss with the National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs the effects of functional disabilities and limitations imposed by alterations in the respiratory system; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consult the National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs in respect of the new rules regulating invalidity benefit.

Mr. Hague: The development of the medical assessment for incapacity benefit included an open consultation process, to which the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund, an associate of the National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs, contributed. If the National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs has further comments on the medical assessment, I would be happy to receive them.

Equal Treatment

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for ensuring the equal treatment of men and women with a dependent spouse in their eligibility for benefits.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Our proposals for ensuring that married couples are treated equally in the state pension scheme are set out in the White Paper, "Equality in State Pension Age", Cm 2420, a copy of which is in the Library. The legislation needed to implement these proposals is included in the Pensions Bill. Dependency increases payable with other benefits are already available on an equal basis.

Income Support and Restart Courses

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many unemployed claimants have received a reduced personal rate of income support following failure to attend or complete a restart course *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in each region, since March 1994.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is available by Benefits Agency territory and is set out in the table.

Number of reductions in income support personal allowance following failure to attend or complete a mandatory restart course

Territory	*Totals (thousands) April 1994 to December 1994*
Southern England	7.6
Wales and Central England	8.2
Scotland and Northern England	6.5
National total	22.3

Note:

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Pensioners

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help is being given to those retired people who were unable to make private pension provisions when they were of working age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: People who have retired since 6 April 1979 may be entitled to receive an additional pension from the state earnings-related pension scheme or a contracted-out equivalent, as well as their basic state pension. Those whose employment patterns have been interrupted because of caring responsibilities may have their basic pension entitlement safeguarded by the home responsibilities protection provisions.

Pensioners who have income below specified levels may, subject to their circumstances, be entitled to receive income-related benefits such as income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken and what further steps are planned to assist poorer pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Income-related benefits are kept under constant review and are uprated regularly in line with prices. In addition, income-related benefits for poorer pensioners since 1988 have been increased by some £1.2 billion, over and above inflation.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the standard of living enjoyed by retired people now, 10 years ago and 20 years ago.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information is not available in the form requested. The information in the table shows the percentage growth in pensioners' average income for the years 1974, 1979 and 1992, the latest year for which figures are available.

	Increase 1974–92 (net income)		Increase 1979–92 (net income)	
	Before housing costs (per cent.)	*After housing costs (per cent.)*	*Before housing costs (per cent.)*	*After housing costs (per cent.)*
Pensioner couples	54	64	46	56
Single pensioners	55	57	49	53
All pensioner units	58	64	50	58

Notes:

1. Source: Family Expenditure Surveys for 1974, 1979 and 1992.2. Pensioner units are single persons over state pension age and couples of whom the husband is over state pension age.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department has made recently of the comparative incomes of retired people in the United Kingdom and other European Union member states; what factors he has taken into account to make such comparisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: A report of research commissioned by this Department from the social policy research unit at the university of York, entitled "Incomes and Living Standards of Older People—A Comparative Analysis", was published on 26 January. A copy is available in the Library. The report is based on a comparison of 11 countries, eight of which are members of the European Union. It found that the United Kingdom has a more equal distribution of income among its older population and a more effective benefit safety net than many other major industrial countries. It concluded that to make meaningful international comparisons it is necessary to take account of all income sources for older people including private occupational and personal pensions and non-cash income sources.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken and what further steps are planned to assist disabled pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: Since April 1992, disabled people aged between 60 and 65 may be entitled to disability living allowance, which meets some of the extra costs of care and mobility needs arising from disability. Attendance allowance is available to disabled people over the age of 65. Both benefits are non-contributory and non-means tested and provide help to increasing numbers of disabled people. Medical adjudication has been replaced by self assessment and entitlement to benefit is determined by lay adjudication officers. The benefits also serve to establish entitlement to other benefits such as invalid care allowance, severe disablement allowance and disability premiums of income support. The policy intention behind all benefits is kept under continuous review.

Benefit Expenditure

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the expenditure arising from the payment of *(a)* contributory benefits, *(b)* non-means tested non-contributory benefits and *(c)* means tested non-contributory benefits for claimants below retirement age in (i) 1978–79 and (ii) 1993–94 in 1993–94 prices.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available in the form requested. Information on benefit expenditure for claimants of any age in 1978–79 and 1993–94 is in the table.

	1993–94 benefit expenditure (£ millions)	*1978–79 benefit expenditure in 1993–94 prices (£ millions)*
Contributory benefits	39,575	30,697
Non-contributory means-tested benefits	28,634	7,714
Non contributory non-means-tested benefits	14,189	7,060

Note:

1. These figures have been taken from the 1995 Social Security Departmental Report and earlier equivalents.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he estimates in 1995–96 who are *(a)* current claimants of invalidity benefit and *(b)* new claimants of incapacity benefit will fall in each of the categories to be treated as incapable of work by virtue of (i) receipt of the highest rate of disability living allowance care component, (ii) suffering from a progressive disease, (iii) registration as a blind person, (iv) tetraplegia, (v) persistent vegetative state, (vi) dementia, (vii) paraplegia, (viii) a severe learning disability, (ix) a severe and progressive neurological and muscle-wasting disease, (x) an active and progressive form of inflammatory polyarthritis, (xi) a progressive impairment of cardio-respiratory function, (xii) dense paralysis of upper limb, trunk and lower limb on one side of the body, (xiii) multiple effects of impairment of function of brain or nervous system, (xiv) a severe and progressive immune deficiency state or (xv) a severe mental illness.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* We do not have information on the number of existing invalidity benefit claimants who are in receipt of the highest rate of care component of disability living allowance. We estimate that there will be no more than 130,000 such claimants. We estimate that around 405,000 existing invalidity benefit claimants will fall into the exemptions for severe medical conditions; 110,000 of these claimants are expected to be exempt because of severe mental illness. Estimates have not been made for the other individual types of condition. Some of those who fall into the exemptions for severe medical conditions will be among those receiving the highest rate of care component of disability living allowance.

We estimate that no more than 10,000 new claimants of incapacity benefit a year will be in receipt of the highest rate of care component of disability living allowance. We estimate that around 40,000 new claimants of incapacity benefit a year will fall into the exemptions

for severe medical conditions; 20,000 of these claimants are expected to be exempt because of severe mental illness. Some of those who fall into the exemptions for severe medical conditions will be among those receiving the highest rate of care component of disability living allowance.

The estimated figures have been rounded up to the nearest 5,000.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 14 March 1995

TREASURY

Exchange Rates (Irish Punt)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the constitutional implications of the severing of the link between the Irish punt and the British pound.

Mr. Nelson: The link between the Irish punt and British pound was severed when Ireland joined the European monetary system. This step had no constitutional implications for the United Kingdom.

Capital Gains Tax Reinvestment Relief

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if investments in companies listed on the unlisted securities market qualify for the reinvestment relief.

Sir George Young: No. Capital gains tax reinvestment relief is available for investment in shares in qualifying unquoted trading companies. As the relevant legislation makes explicit, companies whose shares are dealt in on the unlisted securities market are not unquoted companies for this purpose.

Draft Legislation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what will be the inter-relationship between *(a)* Ministers and private sector lawyers, *(b)* hon. Members, *(c)* Government Whips and *(d)* Select Committees in respect of the contracting out of the drafting of Treasury legislation;

(2) what measures he will take to prevent legal firms operating at below-cost prices to acquire contracts to draft Treasury legislation;

(3) what safeguards will apply *(a)* for ensuring security on Budget details and forecasts and *(b)* for ensuring standards of confidentiality and propriety in respect of the Finance Bill following the contracting out of the drafting of Treasury legislation;

(4) if the costs of trial contracting out of Treasury legislation will appear as *(a)* running costs or *(b)* programme costs; how such costs will be shown when there are changes of dates in respect of policy; and how such costs will be controlled when there is a change in drafting instructions;

(5) which parts of the Finance Bill he plans to contract out and what plans he has for other forms of financial legislation to be contracted out;

(6) what are the criteria by which the success of the exercise in contracting out the drafting of Treasury legislation will be judged; who will assess the success of the exercise; and what quality controls there will be in respect of the drafting of the legislation;

(7) what proportion of contracted-out Treasury legislation will comprise *(a)* primary legislation and *(b)* secondary legislation;

(8) what proposals he has to market test *(a)* market-sensitive and *(b)* non-market-sensitive Treasury legislation;

(9) what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Law Society and *(b)* the Bar Council in respect of the contracting out of the drafting of Treasury legislation;

(10) what will be the relationship between those in the private sector instructed by him and advisers from the Inland Revenue in respect of the contracting out of the drafting of Treasury legislation;

(11) what have been the costs for each of the last five years for drafting legislation in his Department;

(12) how many staff in his Department and at what grade are engaged in drafting legislation;

(13) what are the total annual wages and salary costs in his Department in respect of those engaged in drafting Treasury legislation;

(14) what proposals he has *(a)* to market-test, *(b)* to go to outside contractors without market testing and *(c)* to employ outside contractors as civil servants on short-term contracts in respect of the contracting out of the drafting of Treasury legislation;

(15) if he will list *(a)* his proposals for quality assurance, *(b)* his proposed methods for testing this assurance and *(c)* his proposed penalties for (i) under performance and (ii) loss of revenue as a result of inadequate drafting in respect of the contracting out of the Treasury legislation;

(16) what guarantees his Department will demand of private sector lawyers engaged in the drafting of Treasury legislation to ensure that they do not have any dealings with clients on issues relating to their work for his Department; and what safeguards he will impose to prevent conflicts of interest arising between these lawyers and (i) past and (ii) prospective clients;

(17) what measures he will take to ensure that there is public confidence in the contracted-out Treasury legislation in respect of potential conflicts of interest between those employed to draft legislation for the Government who are also advising private clients.

Sir George Young: My right hon. and learned Friend's plans to involve the private sector in drafting legislation for Treasury Ministers are as follows:

Present practice is that most primary legislation in the areas of responsibility which fall to Treasury Ministers is drafted by Parliamentary Counsel. Officials in the Chancellor's Departments provide Parliamentary Counsel with instructions from which legislation is drafted, but none of the Chancellor's Department employs staff who themselves draft primary legislation.

There have been occasions in the past where lawyers outside Parliamentary Counsel have been engaged in the drafting of primary legislation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is now setting up a pilot project to gain further experience of using the private sector in this area. Potential benefits could include: reducing time pressures caused by the volume of work facing existing draftsmen; widening the range of talent available to departments; bringing relevant specialist

skills into the drafting process, and providing fresh thinking as to how our laws should be drafted.

The pilot scheme will cover some aspects of the 1996 Finance Bill, and possibly also some secondary legislation.

Treasury Ministers are still considering exactly which topics will be chosen for the pilot, but the bulk of the 1996 Finance Bill will continue to be drafted by Parliamentary Counsel in the usual way. Once the topics are selected, the contract or contracts will be let through competitive tender.

Before the contract or contracts are signed, Treasury Ministers will need to satisfy themselves that the contractors chosen will be capable of doing the job well, that sensible financial arrangements are made, that adequate security measures are in place to protect classified information, and that potential conflicts of interest are avoided.

The intention is that Inland Revenue and customs officials will deal directly with the contractors in much the same way as they deal with Parliamentary Counsel. It will be for the Revenue departments to give instructions to the contractors and for those departments to satisfy themselves that the draft legislation that is produced is of a satisfactory standard.

Parliamentary Counsel will be responsible for the rest of the Finance Bill and for ensuring that the clauses and schedules drafted by the contractors are fitted into the Bill in the appropriate place.

When the legislation comes before Parliament, Ministers will look to the contractors, working on instructions from officials, to draw up any Government amendments that are necessary, and to provide advice, for example, on the implications of any other amendments that are tabled. Contractors will be judged on the full range of services they provide.

The fact that part of the Bill will have been drafted by private sector lawyers will not affect the relationships between Ministers and the House or Committees of it.

The experiment will be closely monitored and will be subject to a full evaluation to consider the quality of drafting, other advice, whether timetables were met, security issues, and cost. The analysis of the cost will cover not only the fees for the pilot project, but also an assessment of any differential burden on Revenue department officials compared with using parliamentary counsel. One of the purposes of the pilot will be to look at the overall resources employed by the contractors on the project to improve our understanding of the costs to the private sector of drafting legislation.

The costs of the pilot will fall on departments' running costs. If necessary, the terms of the contract will deal with the possibility of late changes in policy or drafting instructions.

Brays Detective Agency

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the schemes, activities and projects in which Brays Detective Agency has been retained and, in each case, the Government Department sponsoring the scheme and the total expenditure to date.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury has no schemes, activities or projects on which Brays Detective Agency has been retained; and it does not maintain records of other Government Departments' use of detective agencies.

VAT (Church Repairs)

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to changing the rate of VAT on repairs to churches.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Repairs to all buildings, including churches, have been liable to the standard rate of VAT since 1973. The Government are opposed to further reduced rates as a matter of principle.

The introduction of any zero rates, or reduced rates in this area, would also contravene the EC sixth VAT directive.

Select Committee on Sustainable Development

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the reason for the decision that officials from the Treasury would not give oral evidence at the House of Lords Select Committee on Sustainable Development meeting on 7 February.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* The Government's strategy for sustainable development is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I was therefore not persuaded that it would be appropriate for Treasury officials to give oral evidence on the subject as a whole to the Committee on 7 February. Since then, the Committee has provided me with a list of questions relating to specific Treasury responsibilities and I have authorised my Department to submit a memorandum in response.

The accountability of Ministers and the Government to Parliament has always been based on the principle that each Minister answers for subjects within his or her own departmental responsibilities.

TRANSPORT

Transport Research Laboratory

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his objectives in the sale of the Transport Research Laboratory, and if he will make a statement.

Dr Mawhinney: I shall be seeking bids for the Transport Research Laboratory from a wide range of interests. My objectives are:

- to secure the continued provision of high-quality, independent research and development at good value for money across the range of my Department's inland surface transport needs;
- to transfer the laboratory to the private sector as soon as reasonably practicable;
- to optimise the net proceeds to the taxpayer.

In pursuing these objectives, I shall have full regard to the need to help promote a competitive market for the supply of research services to my Department and obtain reassurance that the purchaser has the capacity to meet transferred obligations and liabilities.

The work of our financial advisers, Price Waterhouse, has confirmed that there is interest in acquiring the TRL business as a whole, with a lease or freehold interest in the land and buildings required for the operation of the

Laboratory. I shall be seeking competitive bids for the laboratory on this basis. I have not ruled out any sale option including the possibility of a proposal from TRL's management and staff to take over the Laboratory as a non-profit-distributing company.

To emphasise the Government's continuing commitment to TRL as it moves into the private sector, I have decided to provide the laboratory with guarantees of future research work for a number of years. The guarantees will be subject to the delivery of high-quality, independent and impartial research at competitive prices. Bidders will be asked to demonstrate that the supply of scientific advice and research to Government will not give rise to conflicts of interest with their other operations.

I am aiming to complete the sale of TRL during 1995.

Airports

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusion he has reached on his Department's review of the system of economic regulation of airports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The review considered how the system of economic regulation established in the Airports Act 1986 had worked to date, and whether there was scope for improving the process of regulation. It was not concerned with the principles or methodology of regulation.

Following consultation, my Department has identified a number of measures to improve the way the system works, including clarification of the procedures for regulation of airports and for handling of complaints, improved availability of information, and clarification of the criteria for designating airports under section 40 of the Airports Act 1986 for closer economic regulation. In addition, some measures have been identified which will require legislation; these will be taken forward when the opportunity arises. The main such change concerns the roles of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Civil Aviation Authority in the regulation of the designated airports; it is proposed to adopt a regime based on what has become the "standard" model for the regulation of utilities. It is expected that the next quinquennial reviews of BAA's south-east airports and Manchester airport will proceed under the existing system.

In the light of recommendations from the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, we have also considered whether Glasgow and Edinburgh airports should be designated for the purposes of economic regulation. We have found no evidence of abuse of monopoly position or inefficiency and we have therefore concluded that there is no case at present for designating these airports.

I am placing the report of the conclusions in the review in the Library.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to visit the Newbury constituency in the current year.

Dr. Mawhinney: At present, I have no plans to do so.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of whether Pan Am flight 103 was under special guard at Heathrow airport from the time of arrival from San Francisco at 12.10 hours on 21 December 1994 until take-off for JFK airport, New York at 18.25 hours as described in page 14 of the fatal airport inquiry on the Lockerbie air disaster report.

Mr. Norris: From the evidence given to the fatal accident inquiry, and the earlier investigation by the Metropolitan police into the handling of this flight at Heathrow airport, my Department is satisfied that the Maid of the Seas was under constant supervision by security guards while between flights at the airport on 21 December 1988.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those parts of the railway system which will have been privatised or put out to contract by April 1996.

Mr. Watts *[pursuant to his reply, 6 March 1995, c. 53]:* Union Railways Ltd. and European Passenger Services Ltd. were omitted from the list of sales intended to April 1996.

Detained Ships

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by classification society the number of ships detained by the Marine Safety Agency in the last two years.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Ms Joan Walley, dated 14 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of ships, by classification society, detained by the Marine Safety Agency in the last two years; I attach two tables. The first table gives the number of detentions following port state control inspections in UK ports for 1994. This includes a detention rate based on the total number of inspections carried out on ships classed with the classification society. Equivalent figures for 1993 are not available without undue expenditure but the number of detentions without the amplifying detention rates are listed in the second table.

The figures must be treated with some care as ships may be detained for items which are not the responsibility of a classification society. Also some fish factory ships, klondykers, although in a detainable condition could not be detained because the ships were anchored outside the port when inspected. In a small percentage of cases the classification society has not been recorded because it did not issue the certificates.

Port state control detentions by the marine safety agency listed by classification society

Classification Society	*Number of detentions in 1994*	*Percentage detained*
HINSIB (Honduras)	1	50
Turku Lloyd Vakfi	1	50
Hellenic Register	12	40
Bulgarian Register	7	35
Romanian Register	3	25
China Corporation Register of Shipping	1	25
RINAVE (Portugal)	1	20
American Bureau of Shipping	20	18
Croatian Register	1	14
RINA (Italy)	6	14

Port state control detentions by the marine safety agency listed by classification society

Classification Society	*Number of detentions in 1994*	*Percentage detained*
Nippon Kaiji Kyokai	13	14
Russian Register	43	13
Bureau Veritas	35	13
Register of Shipping of People's Republic of China	1	12
Indian Register	1	11
Lloyd's Register	26	7
Germanischer Lloyd	24	7
Det Norske Veritas	16	6
Polish Register	1	4
Un-classed or class unknown	12	

Port state control detentions by the marine safety agency in 1993 listed by classification society

Classification society	*Number of detentions in 1993*
Bureau Veritas	34
Lloyd's Register	26
Germanischer Lloyd	24
Russian Register	19
American Bureau of Shipping	17
Nippon Kaiji Kyokai	12
Hellenic Register	11
Det Norske Veritas	10
HINSIB (Honduras)	5
Romanian Register	3
Panama Bureau of Shipping	2
RINA (Italy)	2
Indian Register	1
Un–classed or class unknown	8

Rail Track Renewal

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contracts have been agreed by Railtrack for each section of the Great Western mainline, and each branch line, for track renewal, re-sleepering and re-ballasting, for 1995–96; and what has been the value of each contract and track length covered.

Mr. Watts: These activities form part of the track renewal work carried out under contract for Railtrack by that part of British Rail infrastructure services which the British Railways Board expect to offer for sale as the Western track renewal unit later this year. In light of the expected sale, details of the contracts and their value are therefore commercially confidential.

Channel Tunnel Freight

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much freight by tonnage has been transferred from road to the railway system *(a)* since 1 January 1992 and *(b)* since the opening of the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Watts: This information is not available in the form requested. Information on tonnages carried by rail can be found in table 1.12 of "Transport Statistics Great Britain 1994", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Railfreight Distribution has moved over 2,000 trains through the channel tunnel to date.

Mobile Crane Operators

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions currently exist on the maximum working and driving hours for mobile crane operators.

Mr. Norris: Drivers of mobile cranes are subject to national rules on drivers' hours in part VI of the Transport Act 1968, as amended. These limit driving to 10 hours a day. The rules also limit drivers to 11 hours duty each day, but not on days when they do not drive or when they drive for less than four hours on each day of the week.

School Vehicles

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that vehicles hired for the transport of children to and from school have the appropriate licence or that local education authorities be empowered to issue a new form of licence specifically for school transport purposes.

Mr. Norris: All motor vehicles, including those used for school transport, are subject to the requirements of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 and to annual roadworthiness testing. Public service vehicles must also satisfy additional construction requirements and be licensed through the operator licensing system under which their operators are subject to sanction by traffic commissioners if standards are not maintained.

We do not consider further controls to be necessary.

Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those sites where he is currently monitoring vehicle pollution stating in each case *(a)* what monitoring he is undertaking and *(b)* whether PM10 is counted.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency.

I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 14 March 1995:

The Minister for Local Transport and Road Safety, Steven Norris, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those sites where he is currently monitoring vehicle pollution stating in each case (a) what monitoring he is undertaking and (b) whether PM_{10} is counted.

We do not routinely monitor vehicle pollution but the Highways Agency has a number of monitoring stations in operation either for research purposes to aid the development of air quality techniques or to inform environmental assessment of specific highway proposals where appropriate. For most situations involving road schemes we use mathematical modelling to assess pollution levels. Where the modelling techniques cannot adequately reflect the characteristics of a particular location monitoring work is undertaken.

The table below contains our current active sites.

Road Name	*Location*	*Emissions monitored*
M4	Theale	Carbon monoxide Nitric oxide Nitrogen dioxide Total oxides of nitrogen Ozone Total hydrocarbons Non-Methane hydrocarbons Methane Range of poly-aromatic hydrocarbons
Victoria St	London	Carbon monoxide Nitric oxide Nitrogen dioxide Total oxides of nitrogen Ozone Total hydrocarbons Non-methane hydrocarbons Methane Range of poly-aromatic hydrocarbons Benzene Toluene Xylene Range of carbonyl compounds
M4 London	Between Junctions 3 and 4B	Carbon monoxide Nitric oxide Nitrogen dioxide Total oxides of nitrogen PM_{10} Benzene Toluene Xylene
M4 London	Junction 4	Carbon monoxide Nitric oxide Nitrogen dioxide Total oxides of nitrogen
M62 Manchester	East Junction 17	Carbon monoxide Nitric oxide Nitrogen dioxide Total oxides of nitrogen
M2 Kent	Junction 3 Area	Carbon monoxide Nitric oxide Nitrogen dioxide Total oxides of nitrogen Benzene Toluene

At present PM_{10} is measured at one location on the M4 but our intention is to commence monitoring of this emission at new sites on the M62 (Manchester) and the M25 (Surrey) shortly.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pages of forms an applicant for a review of a refusal of an application for disability living allowance has to peruse; and how many pages an appellant has to peruse when making an appeal for disability living allowance, having being rejected on first consideration and review;

(2) how many pages the average applicant for disability living allowance has to peruse in order to make an application.

Mr. Hague: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Mike O'Brien, dated 13 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Disability Living Allowance (DLA) forms.

For an initial claim to DLA there are 60 pages which comprise the claim pack:-

	Pages
Notes	8
Section 1 "Your claim for DLA"	12
Section 2 "How your disability/illness affects you"	28
Additional Section	12

The additional section was introduced to gather information following recent caselaw. Customers must complete section 1; other sections are optional.

A customer is able to request a review of an initial decision whether this was successful or not. The review pack has a total of 48 pages:

	Pages
Section 1 (Personal details)	8
Section 2 (Mobility needs)	8
Section 2 (Care needs)	20
Additional section	12

A review pack is not usually issued where similar information has been obtained within the preceding three months.

A customer can appeal against a review decision by writing to the Benefits Agency. There is no pack for appeal purposes.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Fraud Investigation Costs

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the Government have spent on the detection of benefit fraud for each year sine 1979.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Benefit fraud is investigated by the Benefits Agency, Employment Service and local authorities. Details of local authority expenditure on benefit fraud investigation are not held centrally.

The Benefits Agency's expenditure on fraud investigation is only available for the last two years. Prior to the formation of the Benefits Agency, most anti-fraud work was integrated with benefit claims processing, and other mainstream local office activities, and separate cost data was not kept. However, the bulk of investigations are now carried out by separately managed units for which costs are known.

	£ million
1992–93	66
1993–94	69

These figures include staff and running costs, but not accommodation. Benefit savings for the same periods were £558 million and £654 million respectively.

The cost of Employment Service fraud investigations is available for the past seven years. The figures (including benefit savings for the same periods) are:

	Costs £ millions	*Savings £ millions*
1987–88	15.9	70.5
1988–89	18.7	81.27
1989–90	20.6	70.72
1990–91	21.4	64.94
1991–92	21.5	55.88
1992–93	26.4	71.15
1993–94	26.8	80.12

These figures include staff, accommodation and running costs.

War Widows

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many post-1973 war widows have subsequently re-married in each year for which figures are available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of living post-1973 war widows.

Mr. Arbuthnot: At 1 March 1995 war widows pensions were in payment to 3,151 widows of men whose service in the armed forces ended on or after 31 March 1973.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the additional cost of a flexible decade of retirement between the ages of 60 and 70, compared with the Government's proposals to equalise state pension age at 65.

Mr. Lilley: The Government's plans already allow for indefinite flexibility after state pension age. From 2010, people will receive a 10 per cent. increase in their state pension for every year that they defer drawing it. To allow people to claim their full state pension from age 60, even if the flexibility were limited to a decade, would cost £13 billion a year more by 2030 than age 65.

Pensioners' Incomes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total income of *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* others aged 55 years and over in 1992 from (i) retirement pension, (ii) invalidity benefit, (iii) disability benefits, (iv) widows' and widowers' benefits, (v) income support, (vi) occupational pensions and (vii) personal pensions and annuities.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information is not available in the form requested. The table shows average net weekly incomes from all state benefits and from occupational pensions for people receiving those incomes aged over state pension age and between 55 and state pension age.

Average weekly income from state benefit and occupational pensions[1]

	Benefit income		*Occupational pension*[2]	
	Over state pension age	*55 to state pension age*	*Over state pension age*	*55 to state pension age*
Couples[3]	107.40	74.00	92.00	129.20
Single people	71.40	69.40	52.90	63.20

Notes:
[1] £ per week at July 1992 prices.
[2] No separate information available on receipt of personal pensions and annuities.
[3] Where the husband is aged over state pension age or between 55 and state pension age.
Source:
1992 family expenditure survey.

Family Credit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he *(a)* expects the regulations restoring entitlement to part-time school workers for family credit to come into effect; if they will be retrospective; and if he will consider making ex gratia payments to those who do not qualify for income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: The Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1995—SI 1995 No. 516—were laid before Parliament on 10 March 1995. Regulation 11 of these regulations provides for the hours of school workers and others with a similar pattern of employment to be averaged over termtime only for the purpose of determining whether or not they satisfy the condition of entitlement to family credit that they be working an average of 16 or more hours a week. This will restore the position to that which existed before the commissioner's decision in October 1993. The new provision will apply to awards of family credit commencing on or after 11 April 1995. It will not be retrospective. As all families have been able to claim their legal entitlement, we have no plans to make ex gratia payments.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Apple Orchards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many acres of apple orchards were grubbed up in each of the past three years; what is the present level of application for the EU's grubbing-up grant; and if he will make a statement on the prospects for the Ulster apple industry.

Mr. Ancram: No apple orchards were grubbed up in Northern Ireland in the last three years.

The current apple orchard grubbing-up scheme has attracted three applicants with a total entry of 45.15 acres,

or 18.28 hectares. I am hopeful that the industry will continue to make a valuable contribution to the Northern Ireland horticultural sector and to the food processing industry.

Hospitals Review

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the terms of reference of the McKenna review into closer working relations between the Royal and City hospitals, Belfast.

Mr. Moss: The terms of reference for the acute services reorganisation project chaired by Dr. McKenna are as follows:

> "To develop and oversee the implementation of a coherent strategy for the reorganisation of services at the Royal Group of Hospitals Trust and the Belfast City Hospital Trust to provide a sound basis for their future development, having regard to services presently located at other hospitals in the Greater Belfast area where relevant".

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what humanitarian aid and development assistance is currently being given or is planned by the European Union for Angola.

Mr. Baldry: Angola has a national indicative programme of 115 mecu, or (£93 million, under EDF VII—1991 to 1995—for long-term development assistance. In addition, a special six months humanitarian plan for 6 mecu, or £4.9 million, was agreed for Angola on 30 November 1994.

European Development Fund

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the obstacles to agreement at the special Foreign Affairs Council in February on the size of the eighth European development fund for 1995 to 2000; and what are the time scale and approach that are going to be used to settle these disagreements.

Mr. Baldry: The size of EDF VIII was not settled in February since the contributions offered by member states did not reach the target figure tabled by the presidency. Further discussions are envisaged at the informal meeting of Foreign Ministers on 18 and 19 March and at the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 April.

Iraq

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent relief agencies providing humanitarian aid for the Kurds have been endangered by Iraqi Government shelling of Arbil in contravention of the safe haven policy instituted after the Gulf war.

Mr. Baldry: We are concerned that relief workers may be endangered by indiscriminate Iraqi Government shelling of northern Iraq. We continue to press Iraq to abide by Security Council resolution 688, which calls on the Iraqi regime to cease repression of its own people.

Arun III Project, Nepal

Mr. Denham To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the German Federal Audit Office's investigation into the value for money represented by the planned Arun III hydropower project in Nepal; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the independent reports comparing the relative value for money of the Arun III hydropower project and the various possible alternative investments in Nepal's energy sector proposed by the Alliance for Energy and the Arun Concerned Group.

Mr. Baldry: We have not seen the reports referred to.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the board of the World bank to consult as widely as possible to identify the most appropriate and effective power scheme for the sustainable development of Nepal before taking any final decision on funding for the Arun III hydropower project.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *480–81.*

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank to vote to allow the inspection panel to complete necessary field work for their investigation into the Arun III hydropower project before the Government of Nepal reach a final decision on funding.

Mr. Baldry: The board has already decided that field work should commence only after the bank has received a decision from the Government of Nepal as to whether they wish to request IDA funding for the Arun III project.

Palestinians

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs what plans he has to provide further aid to the Palestinians.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister today announced a new £7 million bilateral aid package for the Palestinians. Some £2 million of this will be provided for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's peace implementation programme. Some £5 million will be allocated to a know-how programme covering assistance for management training for the ministries of the Palestinian Authority, small-scale water and sewage treatment plants and water leak detection, health management and education, including English language teaching. We are also hoping to promote joint projects with UK private sector companies to help generate exports and employment in the west bank and Gaza strip. Basic training for the civil police will also be considered. In addition, $1 million will be given towards the costs of UNRWA's moving offices to Gaza.

This will bring our total aid to the Palestinians in support of the peace process to £82 million.

SCOTLAND

Health Care International

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) by what method the contract for orthopaedic

out-patients was awarded to Health Care International by Forth Valley health board; and on what terms NHS providers were allowed to compete for the contract;

(2) if he was consulted by Forth Valley health board before it provided Health Care International with the names and addresses of NHS orthopaedic out-patients awaiting appointments; and if he consented to this information being given to HCI without the knowledge of the patients concerned.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is a matter for Forth Valley health board. It is appropriate for health boards to buy services from independent hospitals in order to reduce waiting times. I understand that in order to meet patients charter waiting time guarantees for orthopaedic out-patient appointments, the board carried out a tendering exercise, including NHS and independent providers, which was won by Health Care International.

Individual patients, were then offered the choice of orthopaedic out-patient treatment at HCI. There is no requirement for the board to consult the Secretary of State before providing HCI with the names and addresses of those patients awaiting appointments.

National Continence Day

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has concerning the promoting and publicising of National Continence Day on Wednesday 21 March; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office is providing funding for the staffing of a telephone helpline at the continence resource centre, Southern General Hospital NHS trust, Glasgow from 6 March for a four-week period, including National Continence Day. Leaflets advertising the helpline and encouraging sufferers to seek help will be distributed to a range of outlets within and outwith the health sector. Advertisements are being placed in some Scottish newspapers and a press release will be issued on 20 March. The press release will include details of local continence adviser contact numbers and ethnic minority helpline numbers. A number of events are also being organised across the country by local health service professionals. The Scottish Office is happy to promote the campaign to increase awareness of this distressing condition and to encourage sufferers to seek advice and treatment.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will present to the Select Committee on National Security the information from the Crown Office which caused Sheriff John Mowat QC to uphold the objection of Mr. Colin McEachran from the Department of Transport to any evidence in the Lockerbie case relating to the operation of intelligence agencies into the United Kingdom, as being contrary to the national interest, as stated on page 14 of the determination in the fatal accident inquiry relating to Lockerbie.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such information was placed before Sheriff Principal Mowat QC by the Crown Office. The objection to evidence relating to the operation of the intelligence agencies of the United Kingdom was made by counsel appearing on behalf of the Home Office and the Department of Transport. The fatal accident inquiry relating to Lockerbie was heard entirely in public and all information and evidence presented to the inquiry was heard in public.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether it was with the agreement of the Crown Office that ex-Chief Constable George Esson gave an interview to the *Glasgow Herald* on Lockerbie published on Monday 20 February.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Mr. George Esson, formerly chief constable, Dumfries and Galloway constabulary, did not seek the agreement of Crown Office in giving the interview to the *Glasgow Herald* published on 20 February 1995.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what study the Crown Office have made of Mr. Alan Francovitie's response to ex-Chief Constable Esson, a copy of which has been sent to the Lord Advocate.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This article, like all items in the media relating to Lockerbie which come to their attention, has been considered by the prosecuting and investigating authorities.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of probabilities, referred to in charge 10, page 15 of the report of the fatal accident investigation into the Lockerbie air disaster, of a suitcase with explosives arriving at Frankfurt on a flight or an airline, other than Pan American.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The assessment of probabilities by my noble and learned Friend the then Lord Advocate was reflected in the instruction to the procurator fiscal at Dumfries to request petition warrants for the two named accused on charges which alleged that the suitcase containing an improvised explosive device was placed on board Air Malta flight KM180 to Frankfurt am Main airport at Luqa airport, Malta and was at Frankfurt am Main airport placed on board Pan American World Airways flight 103A to London Heathrow airport.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what record the Crown Office has of any onward confirmed ticket to New York from Luqa airport, Malta, in December 1988 via Frankfurt and Heathrow; and what estimate he has made of the evidence of Miss Milne on page 41 of the determination by Sheriff Mowatt QC in relation to Lockerbie and whether a bag could enter the inter-line system unless an onward confirmed ticket had been issued.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not the position of the Crown Office as reflected in the criminal petition against the two Libyan accused that the suitcase which contained the improvised explosive device was loaded at Luqa airport as luggage relating to a passenger travelling on such a route. The evidence of Miss Milne was considered along with all other evidence which was available to the Crown prior to the commencement of criminal proceedings.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what official apologies have been given by the Scottish Office and the Crown Office to Dr. David Fieldhouse, police surgeon of Bradford, in relation to Lockerbie.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. Counsel appearing on behalf of the chief constable for Dumfries and Galloway constabulary withdrew the suggestion the Dr. Fieldhouse had been unaccompanied during his searches at Lockerbie at the conclusion of his cross-examination of Dr. Fieldhouse on day 47 of the fatal accident inquiry.

Forestry

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hectares the Forestry Commission has planted during the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Sir Hector Monro: In the 10 years to 31 March 1994, the Forestry Commission planted 116,201 hectares of woodland.

Planning Application Fees

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on the devolution of planning application fees to local authorities, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: In December 1993, my right hon. Friend announced that he would consider the issue of a consultation paper on the devolution of planning fees to local authorities. The policy initiative is still under consideration and further discussions will take place with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other interested parties before a decision is taken on the most appropriate way forward.

In the meantime, fees will continue to be set centrally.

Shipping Subsidiaries

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his decision following the shipping subsidies review in relation to shipping services on the west coast of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: After very careful and detailed consideration, I have concluded that tariff rebate subsidies on bulk freight to and from the west coast of Scotland should be progressively withdrawn. In order to avoid the possibility of immediate freight rate increases affecting commodities of significance for island residents, I intend to phase out the payment of TRS on some commodities over a period of three years. The TRS rate is currently 40 per cent. for imports to the Western Isles and 30 per cent. for exports from the Western Isles. As from 1 May 1995, I intend to set both rates at 30 per cent. followed by annual reductions to 20 per cent., 10 per cent. and zero from the beginning of each subsequent financial year. The tapering of subsidy over three years should provide existing companies with the opportunity to consolidate their market position, and make efficiency improvements, while at the same time enabling other companies to become increasingly competitive with those companies whose subsidy is reducing. I would expect to see a competitive market develop which would act as a constraint on freight rate increases.

I have, however, concluded that there is scope for the exclusion of certain commodities from being eligible for TRS in a shorter period. As from 1 September 1995 the transport of raw timber, quarry products and road salt will no longer be eligible to receive TRS.

I do not consider that the export of primary commodities requires continued subsidy. There are currently very substantial amounts of timber being extracted from the west coast of Scotland and forestry extraction is expected to more than double over the next 15 years. The shipping market needs to adjust to the scale of these operations; and I believe that continuation of TRS on timber is unnecessary and would distort the market. Quarry products and road salt currently receive a lower rate of subsidy than generally available. Given the low amount of subsidy currently payable on these commodities, I would expect efficiency savings to restrain any price increase.

After consideration of representations received, I have been persuaded by the evidence put to me, that in relation to movements of fishmeal and fish oil from Shetland, complete withdrawal of subsidy on 1 May would be likely to have significant adverse effects on the industry; and that a period of adjustment is required. I have concluded that subsidy should be retained; and set, with effect from 1 May, at a rate of 30 per cent., followed by reductions to 20 per cent., 10 per cent. and zero from the beginning of each subsequent financial year.

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for shipping subsidies for sea transport services in the highlands and islands other than those provided by Caledonian MacBrayne; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the estimates, I propose to make available in 1995–96 total subsidy provision under the tariff rebate subsidy scheme of £9.1 million. For services to Orkney and Shetland, tariff rebate subsidies of up to £8.3 million will be made available, and up to £800,000 will be available for bulk shippers operating on the west coast of Scotland and to and from the Northern Isles.

The provision includes subsidy of up to £7.6 million to P and O Scottish Ferries Ltd. for the operation of passenger and accompanied car services for the year to 31 March 1996 and for freight services to 30 April 1995. As previously announced, I intend subject to the approval of Parliament and of the European Commission, to change the method of subsidy for passenger and accompanied car services to a block grant payable over a period of years in accordance with a contract to operate a specified level of service. I propose in due course to put the service out to competitive tender.

Abattoirs

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for an assessment of hygiene standards in Scottish abattoirs.

Sir Hector Monro: The hygiene assessment carried out on behalf of my Department covers five specific aspects of abattoir operations. These are ante-mortem inspection, slaughter and dressing, personnel and practices, maintenance and hygiene of premises and general condition and management.

Hygiene standards in Scottish abattoirs are generally good, although my Department is making specific efforts to encourage those with lower scores to improve their standards. The table shows the results recorded at the latest inspection visit to each slaughterhouse in Scotland for the period ending November 1994.

Scores band	All Scottish abattoirs	Numbers by category of slaughterhouses: Full EC approval	Low-throughput[1]	Temporary derogated[2]
21-30	0	0	0	0
31-40	0	0	0	0
41-50	0	0	0	0
51-60	10	4	1	5
61-70	16	11	4	1
71-80	16	12	1	3
81-90	5	4	1	0
91-100	1	0	0	1

[1] Throughput = 20 livestock units, or less, per week. [2] Abattoirs operating under workplan to upgrade to the structural standards laid down in the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992. Completion of work is required by 31 December 1995.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* Registers of Scotland, *(b)* the Scottish Prison Service, *(c)* the Scottish Record Office *(d)* the Lord Advocate's Department and *(e)* the Scottish Office.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Sickness absence is taken seriously by management and a number of local initiatives have been introduced with a view to reducing it to a minimum. In the Scottish Office, for example, managers are provided with regular information which enables them to monitor absences in their area. As well as taking steps to ensure greater control and management of sick absence, a number of health initiatives have been introduced, including the introduction of an alcohol policy, health screening for staff, the promotion of the benefits of exercise, a healthy life style and eating, the creation of a smoke-free environment and training in stress management.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* A total of 474 letters were received from hon. Members in January 1995.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The information requested for January 1995 is as follows:

Minister	Number of letters sent to hon. Members
Secretary of State	54
Minister of State	119
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	62
Sir Hector Monro	47
Mr. Allan Stewart	51

Special Advisers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the role of his special advisers employed to serve his Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* My special advisers assist my colleagues and me with that part of their work which is partly governmental and partly political. Their duties vary.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to prevent delays in the Government office on Merseyside in processing objective 1 applications for ERDF funding.

Mr. Eggar: One hundred and six applications have been approved in principle. Two have since been withdrawn. Forty-three grant offer letters have been issued. On 26 applications, further information is awaited from applicants. Thirty-five applications are currently with the Government office, where further information provided recently is being urgently assessed. These will be cleared as quickly as possible. Partners have been asked to ensure early provision of outstanding information, so that processing of all applications can be completed as soon as possible.

Assisted Areas

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many grants have been offered under assisted area status; how many have been accepted; what estimate he has made of the number of jobs which should be created; and what was the total of public money spent and the total of the projects costs for *(a)* Dover/Deal, *(b)* Sittingbourne/Sheerness, *(c)* Folkestone, *(d)* Thanet and *(e)* the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested, as at the end of January 1995, is as follows:

	Number of grant offers	Number of grant offers accepted	Jobs created	Value of grants £000	Total Project costs £000
Dover and Deal	4	2	35	140	1,248
Sittingbourne and Sheerness	21	16	304	844	8,784
Folkestone	6	4	115	460	4,288
Thanet	14	12	187	1,545	8,350
Isle of Wight	10	9	142	738	5,688

Iraqi-British Interests Group

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what dates he or his representatives *(a)* met and *(b)* plan to meet members of the Iraqi-British Interests Group after its visit to Baghdad.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My officials met members of the Iraqi-British Interests Group on 7 and 9 March; there are no further meetings currently planned.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the terms of the communications licences issued by him to the Iraqi-British Interests Group before its recent visit to Baghdad; who were the members of the group; and which firms they represented.

Mr. Ian Taylor: It has been the policy of successive Administrations not to comment on individual licencing cases unless the public interest outweighs the need for confidentiality.

Arms Exports to Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what requests for export licences for the export of arms to Indonesia have been refused in the past 10 years.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The table shows the total number of export licence applications for goods on the military list of the Export of Goods (Control) Orders variously in force at the time.

Information for earlier years is available only at disproportionate cost.

Year	*Refused*
1991	2
1992	1
1993	0
1994	5
1995	0

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the purpose and outcome of the recent Department of Trade and Industry supported delegation to Angola.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The recent mission to Angola was the first foreign delegation to visit the country since the peace agreement was signed and the first UK mission since 1992. The mission was led by one of the Department's export promoters, David Chambers, on secondment from Hull Blythe—Angola.

The purpose of the mission was to explore opportunities in the Angolan oil sector, a sector which has remained unaffected by the civil war and Angola's economic difficulties and which has been an area of considerable success for UK companies in the past. Our decision to mount the mission was prompted by increased interest in the area among UK companies, including recent new investment by BP and a joint venture success involving AMEC, and it proved to be a success. Mission members identified at least $1.5 billion worth of new business in the oil sector and the trip is expected to give rise to further business in due course.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the US authorities since 1992 about concerns from British industry and commerce that Menwith Hill station, in north Yorkshire, is engaged in communications monitoring to the disadvantage of United Kingdom commercial interests.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* My Department is investigating a report of interference from a radio station at Menwith Hill to a nearby radio station. The latter forms part of a network which provides a radio telephone service to airline passengers. No representations have been made to the US authorities.

Commercial Espionage

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received from United Kingdom industry and commerce about commercial espionage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* None.

Unpaid Telephone Bills

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the percentage of unpaid telephone bills, in arrears, at the end of the last financial year.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* This is a matter for the telecommunications operators.

Sickness Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism in *(a)* Companies House, *(b)* the National Weights and Measures Agency, *(c)* the Accounts Services Agency, *(d)* the Patent Office, *(e)* the Insolvency Service, *(f)* NEL and *(g)* his Department.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* I have asked the chief executives of the agencies to write to the hon. member. As far as my Department is concerned the management of sickness absence has been identified as a priority for line managers, with an overall target of reducing this absence to the current level of similar organisations in the private sector.

Letter from John Hobday to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 9 March 1995:

I refer to your question of 28 February to the President of the Board of Trade about the measures he is taking to combat sickness absenteeism. I am answering in respect of the Accounts Services Agency (ASA).

ASA employs approximately 100 staff. In recent years the Agency's sickness absence rate has been exacerbated by the breakdown in health of, or injury to, a number of them. Alcoholism, burns, cancer, fractures, myocardial infarction, pregnancy complications and stress were involved. Over the period one officer died, three others were medically retired and one short term contract was not renewed, the officer concerned accounting for a significant amount of sick leave. Additionally, two officers are in the process of being medically retired and another has been given notice of dismissal on the grounds of poor attendance.

ASA fully recognises the problems generated by absenteeism and is addressing them.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 14 March 1995:

In his response to your recent PQ, the President of the Board of Trade asked me as Chief Executive of Companies House, to write to you outlining the measures taken by this Agency to combat sickness absenteeism.

Our sickness absence at Companies House for the last twelve months has been 4.41%. In considering this figure you should be aware that some 30% of our employees work part-time, and some 10% work on a shift basis. Traditionally in both private and public sectors, absenteeism rates are higher within these employment systems.

Our actual sickness absence record over the last few years has been as follows.

1994: 4.4%

1993: 4.6%

1992: 5.3%

As you will see there has been a gradual improvement but this should not indicate that we are either satisfied or complacent with the latest figure.

We implement a comprehensive management framework to address the problem of absenteeism which includes the following measures:

1. All absenteeism is monitored on a regular basis and monthly league tables on sickness absenteeism are presented to managers of every section throughout Companies House. Managers of sections which are regularly above the average for our organisation are asked to explain the reasons for that discrepancy and to report on the actions they will be taking to improve their record.

2. All new managers attend a training programme in developing skills and expertise in "Managing Sickness Absence".

3. Follow up or refresher sessions are available for more experienced managers.

4. Our Personnel Section regularly monitors absence trends, long-term sickness and any dubious attendance patterns. During the last twelve months we have dismissed four people from our organisation as a result of unacceptable sickness absence.

5. For cases of genuine sickness absence, we offer advice to employees either through our Personnel Section, the staff counselling service or a locally based Civil Service doctor.

6. We encourage staff to take advantage of a variety of Health Screening opportunities and the Civil Service Sanatorium Society.

7. We have an on-site gymnasium and our social club offers a range of fitness classes throughout the year.

8. During the longer school holidays we operate play school facilities to ensure absence levels are not influenced by young family commitments.

9. We have set ourselves a target to reduce absenteeism below 4% by the beginning of 1996 and at least maintain, and hopefully improve, that record throughout the year.

I hope this information is what you require.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 7 March 1995:

In the absence of Peter Joyce, the Chief Executive, the President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question which asked what measures The Insolvency Service is taking to combat sickness absenteeism.

In recent years The Service has run Wellperson clinics which have helped to promote an understanding of health issues amongst our staff. At the same time we have been actively seeking to reduce the level of sick leave absences. We have clearly defined threshold points at which action by personnel managers is taken with regard to sick leave including, where appropriate, the involvement of staff counsellors. In more extreme cases such action has culminated in termination of services or medical retirement.

The active management of sick leave absences and the reduction of sick leave to the current level of The Service's private sector have been identified as priorities for all our line managers.

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 14 March 1995:

I would refer to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade on the subject of sickness absenteeism. I would confirm that NEL's policy is in line with that of the DTI and that the management of sickness absence has been identified as a priority of all line managers in NEL with the objective of reducing this form of absence to a level similar to that found in well run organisations in the private sector. To assist Managers in the task of affecting this reduction the frequency of information provided to each Manager showing the recorded sickness levels within his command has been increased and a quarterly review of the position is made at the Directorate and Divisional Managers meetings.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 14 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your Parliamentary Question about the management of sickness absenteeism.

This Agency had one of the lowest absenteeism rates in DTI until the last two years, when the average figure has been distorted by the inclusion of one member of staff (of a complement of 48) who was on long-term sickness absence leading to eventual retirement on medical grounds. His absence accounts for the greater part of the increase seen in the average figure for NWML.

Nevertheless, I have identified the management of sickness absence as a priority for line managers within this Agency in line with the action to be taken in the rest of DTI. Other proactive steps are being taken here to ensure that sickness absence is maintained below the level of similar organisations elsewhere.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 14 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to respond on behalf of the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question about sickness absence.

The management of sickness absence is a priority for line managers within the Patent Office and we have a manual to help managers deal with unsatisfactory attendance. In addition we have a sickness counselling scheme which is effective in addressing short term absences and we also use staff counselling to help staff with long-term health difficulties.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Council of Ministers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give an account of decisions taken in the European Community Council of Ministers meeting on 9 March; if he will make it his policy that the United Kingdom will not accept majority voting on European Community immigration policy or visa policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The main results of the Council were as follows.

The member states signed a convention on simplified extradition procedures. This was the first convention to be adopted under the third pillar of the treaty on European Union.

In accordance with proposals originally put forward by the United Kingdom, the Council agreed in principle to focus in the short term on the preparation of a legally binding instrument on fraud affecting the Community budget that would deal only with key elements. This should enable the Council to meet the European Council's request that agreement on a legally binding instrument on this subject should be reached in the first half of 1995, and would be without prejudice to the continuation of

more detailed work on fraud against the Community budget. The Government welcome this further progress in the fight against fraud.

The Council noted progress on the development of a convention covering jurisdiction and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial cases, known as the Brussels convention II. It agreed that officials should continue work with a view to the first part of the convention covering scope and jurisdiction, being concluded by June.

The Council adopted a joint action extending the remit of the Europol drugs unit in The Hague to cover the fight against illegal trade in radioactive and nuclear materials, the smuggling of persons, vehicle trafficking and associated money laundering operations.

The Council considered the outstanding issues arising from the draft Europol convention and instructed officials to continue to work to resolve them in the light of the views that had been expressed.

The Council requested the Committee of Permanent Representatives to consider remaining points of difficulty on the draft convention establishing a customs information system.

The Council reached broad agreement on the text of a regulation on a uniform format for visas, subject to a parliamentary scrutiny reserve entered by the UK pending debate in Parliament on the draft external frontiers convention and related matters.

The Council adopted a resolution on minimum guarantees for asylum procedures. The UK made a declaration that it would apply the prescribed procedures relating to any applications by nationals of member states to the extent permitted by domestic legislation.

Significant differences of view emerged during discussion of a draft resolution on burden sharing of temporarily displaced persons, on which the Council commissioned further work by officials.

The Council approved the third pillar contribution to the European Union's strategy on racism and xenophobia which will be considered by the European Council meeting at Cannes.

Immigration and visa matters are generally handled, in the European Union context, under the provisions of title VI—the third pillar—of the treaty of European Union. Proceedings under title VI are subject to a unanimity voting regime, and it is the Government's policy to ensure that this is maintained. The Community has competence under article 100c of the treaty of Rome only in relation to the common visa list and a uniform visa format. Article 100c provides that the uniform visa format is already subject to qualified majority voting: the common visa list will be subject to qualified majority voting from 1 January 1996.

Community Sentencing

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on community sentencing.

Mr. Howard: I will tomorrow lay before Parliament and publish a Green Paper which invites views on wide-ranging proposals intended to strengthen and simplify the arrangements for the punishment of offenders in the community.

Policing, Powys

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the future policing arrangements for the new unitary district of Powys.

Mr. Howard: I have consulted the forces, police authorities and local authorities in the area on the future policing arrangements for the new unitary district of Powys. In the light of the replies received, I have decided that the Dyfed Powys constabulary shall be responsible for policing the whole of the new district from 1 April 1996.

An order will be made in due course, under section 21A of the Police Act 1964, as inserted by section 14 of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, to give effect to this decision, following discussions with the police authorities and forces concerned on the details of its content.

Police (Truck Cargo Vehicles)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contribution is made by his Department to local police authority budgets to cover their responsibilities in providing necessary assistance to truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles.

Mr. Maclean: The level of assistance provided is an operational matter for the chief constable. Any costs are provided for in the same way as for other forms of policing.

Cautions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cautions were issued by police forces in England and Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of persons cautioned by police force area is published annually in the "Criminal Statistics England and Wales", supplementary tables, Vol 3; table S3.7A of the 1990 edition and table S3.6A of the 1991 to 1993 editions refer to this. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

1994 data will not be available until autumn 1995.

Intercepted Telephone Calls

Mr. Madden : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Government Communications Headquarters staff at Menwith Hill station are required to obtain warrants signed by him before intercepting domestic and international phone calls made in or from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* No. All interception of communications on public telecommunications systems in the United Kingdom is subject to the provisions of the Interception of Communications Act 1985, but ministerial responsibility for GCHQ is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the

number of applications for asylum in 1994 by *(a)* nationality and *(b)* location of application.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is given in the table.

Applications[1] for asylum, received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by nationality and location where made, 1994

Number of principal applicants

	Applied at port	*Applied in-country*	*Total*
Europe and Americas			
Bulgaria	15	215	235
Colombia	275	130	405
Czechoslovakia	5	5	10
Poland	140	220	360
Romania	60	300	355
Former Soviet Union	50	540	595
Turkey	595	1,450	2,045
Former Yugoslavia	310	1,075	1,385
Others	300	560	865
Total	1,755	4,495	6,250
Middle East			
Iran	135	385	520
Iraq	250	300	550
Lebanon	70	145	215
Others	340	355	695
Total	795	1,185	1,985
Africa			
Algeria	130	865	995
Angola	155	455	605
Cameroon	10	65	75
Ethiopia	150	580	730
Ghana	445	1,590	2,035
Ivory Coast	425	280	705
Kenya	655	475	1,130
Liberia	80	55	140
Nigeria	500	3,840	4,340
Sierra Leone	960	850	1,810
Somalia	785	1,055	1,840
South Africa	40	45	85
Sudan	75	255	330
Togo	10	45	55
Uganda	105	255	360
Zaire	360	415	775
Others	370	585	950
Total	5,245	11,715	16,960
Asia			
Afghanistan	250	75	325
China	275	150	425
India	275	1,755	2,030
Pakistan	200	1,610	1,810
Sri Lanka	1,270	1,080	2,350
Others	40	530	575
Total	2,310	5,205	7,515
Other and unknown nationalities	125	—	125
Grand Total	10,230	22,600	32,830

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applicants refused asylum, having lost their appeal against the asylum decision, subsequently appealed against deportation in 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available in the form requested.

Hunger Strikes

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what definition of a hunger strike is used by his Department; and what action is taken by police or prison staff when hunger strikes occur.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A hunger strike is a situation in which an individual refuses to take food and/or fluid.

The management and care of prisoners in Prison Service custody who refuse food and/or fluid is governed by the necessity to identify the underlying reasons for such refusal to eat or drink. There is also a necessity to distinguish between those who refuse while of sound mind and those who refuse at a time when, because of a mental illness, they are unable to make a rational judgment.

The governor and prison medical officer are informed of any prisoners not taking food or fluids. The refusal is recorded in the returned food book, which is signed daily by a medical officer. If the food and/or fluid refusal continues, the prisoner will be admitted to the health care centre or transferred to another prison with a higher level of nursing care. For those patients with impaired capacity for rational judgment, arrangements will be made to transfer them to a national health service psychiatric hospital for treatment under the terms of the Mental Health Act.

Once in the health care centre, the patient's condition is monitored on a daily basis by the prison medical officer, together with a consultant psychiatrist. If refusal persists, a specialist physician will be called in. Fluid is always available, and food is available each meal-time. The patient will be given every encouragement to resume feeding.

In the case of those whose mental capacity is not impaired, the medical officer will clarify the extent of the refusal, and inform the patient of the following:

- that they will continue to receive medical supervision and advice;
- that the medical officer, except in the most limited and exceptional circumstances, will not force-feed, hydrate, or otherwise artificially provide nutrition without the patient's consent;
- that they will be warned of the medical consequences of continuing refusal, and of the inevitable deterioration in health which will follow, until and unless medical intervention is requested.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 limits the amount of time that a suspect can be held in police detention, normally to a maximum of 24 hours. It places responsibility for the welfare of people so detained on the custody officer, who is required to immediately call a police surgeon or, in urgent cases send the person to hospital, if a detained person appears to need medical attention.

There is no specific guidance issued to police for hunger strikes. As the Police and Criminal Evidence Act prescribes time limits for holding a suspect in police detention, a detained person is unlikely to be held long enough in police cells to be able to undertake a hunger strike.

Fines

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total of fines *(a)* imposed and *(b)* collected by magistrates and Crown courts in Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Information held centrally, which is given in the table, shows the number of fines and the value of the amounts issued by type of court in Wales for 1990 to 1993.

1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Information is not collected centrally by my Department on the amounts of fines paid.

Fines data for Wales by type of court 1990 to 1993

Court/year	*Number of fines*	*Amount issued* £
Magistrates courts		
1990	129,277	8,851,600
1991	102,425	7,077,700
1992	117,729	8,586,000
1993	100,893	9,082,700
Crown court		
1990	640	162,400
1991	610	231,000
1992	651	130,300
1993	356	91,800

Source:
Home Office.

Special Constables

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were employed by the Welsh police forces in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The number of special constables employed by the Welsh police forces in each year since 1990 is as follows:

As at 31 December	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Dyfed-Powys	210	315	260	271	306
Gwent	76	80	101	109	124
North Wales	199	256	295	298	315
South Wales	257	352	432	534	488
Total	742	1,003	1,088	1,212	1,233

The Government have set forces a target of increasing the number of special constables in England and Wales to 30,000 by 1996. This is an increase of 10,000 on present strength.

As a result of the current national advertising campaign comprising both television commercials and press advertisements, inquiries and preliminary application forms received to date are as follows:

As at 3 March 1995	*Enquiry*	*Application*
Dyfed-Powys	35	14
Gwent	199	60
North Wales	20	4
South Wales	772	265
Total	1,026	343

Bilateral Agreements

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 March, *Official Report*, column *655*, when he proposes to negotiate a bilateral agreement with the Republic of Ireland; and if he will list those countries *(a)* with which the United kingdom has negotiated such bilateral agreements and *(b)* with which bilateral agreements are being negotiated.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Following the implementation of the Football Spectators Act 1989, which extends only to England and Wales, we invited all countries who were members of the Union of European Football Associations, including the Republic of Ireland, to enter into bilateral agreements on corresponding offences. Following the disorder in Dublin on 15 February, my officials will again be raising with their Irish counterparts the prospects of an agreement.

We have also encouraged other member states which have ratified the 1985 European convention on spectator violence and misbehaviour at sports events and in particular at football matches to enter into such agreements with us.

Currently, we have bilateral agreements only with Scotland, Sweden and Italy. Unfortunately, it has not so far proved possible to reach more agreements. The negotiations themselves are usually long and tortuous, exacerbated by the fundamental differences between our legal system and that of the other country. Some countries see the restriction order, as set out in the 1989 Act, as a further criminal penalty which could be in breach of their own legal code through punishing a person twice for the same offence. There are also difficulties in the definitions of what constitutes a football-related offence in another country and whether they correspond to those offences set out in schedule 1 to the 1989 Act. Some countries, where hooliganism is not a significant problem, may not share the same priority in reaching an agreement over something which does not concern their own citizens, but only hooligans from this country. In some cases, on all but the most serious offences, a country may simply prefer as a matter of policy to deport a hooligan quickly without a court appearance, thereby removing the basis of a possible bilateral agreement.

Football Violence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *408*, what proposals he has to introduce legislation to provide a separate power to prevent a person subject to a restriction order from leaving the country at the stipulated time.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. member to my written answer of 2 March, *Official Report*, column *656*. Although I sympathise with the hon. Member's desire for immediate action, it is important to consider carefully the full range of options, both legislative and administrative, that may be necessary to deal effectively with the problem of football hooliganism.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 March, *Official Report*, columns *655–56*, if the restriction orders authority is now in a position to confirm whether the

second person subject to a restriction order breached the terms of that order.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* I understand that the restriction orders authority has not yet received confirmation that the person concerned reported to a police station as required. The authority has therefore notified the police station nearest to his home address. It is for the local police to consider investigating the relevant circumstances and to determine whether a criminal offence has been committed under section 16 of the Football Spectators Act 1989.

Live Animal Transport, Shoreham

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the police received 26 hours' notification of the intended arrival of six cattle trucks at Shoreham port on the night of 6 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* No. I understand that Sussex police were informed at 3.30 pm on Monday 6 March that six lorries carrying live animals would be arriving at Shoreham that night. In the event, Sussex police instructed the lorries to turn back for operational and public safety reasons associated with the presence of demonstrators at Shoreham. Policing of the demonstrations is the responsibility of the chief constable of Sussex.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training providers existed as contractors for training for work provision during 1994–95; and how many contracts are being offered for 1995–96.

Mr. Paice: The Department contracts with training and enterprise councils for the delivery of training programmes including training for work. As private companies, TECs decide their own contracting arrangements with training providers. The Department does not collect information on TECs' contracts with providers.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for transfers from training for work to supported self-employment for the year 1995–96 to attract a payment for training providers.

Mr. Paice: The Department makes payments to training and enterprise councils, not directly to training providers. The Department will make an outcome payment to TECs in respect of trainees who have been in unsupported self-employment for the 13 weeks immediately after leaving training for work.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimated number of start-ups for training for work schemes for 1995–96 who will receive enterprise allowance or equivalent support.

Mr. Paice: There are no targets set for the number of starts for trainees who will receive support during a period of self-employment while on training for work. It is for training and enterprise councils to determine the volume of such starts in the light of prevailing local circumstances.

Remploy

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the process of awarding contracts to Remploy and other clothing contractors has been altered in the current year.

Miss Widdecombe: Contracts arrangements in the private sector are a matter for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, at the Department of Trade and Industry. As to contracts in the public sector, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *637–39* when I announced the introduction of the special contracts arrangement.

Asbestos

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans his Department has to review the effectiveness of the current legislation protecting workers from the dangers of asbestos.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive is satisfied that current legislation and guidance provide an adequate framework for preventing and controlling the risks posed by exposure to asbestos dust. There are no plans to review the main legislation. However, the HSE is concerned to ensure compliance with the precautions required by legislation and that the risks posed by asbestos are properly understood. A campaign to this end is currently underway.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for how long the current Health and Safety Executive publicity awareness campaign concerning the risks of asbestos dust is expected to run.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive launched its asbestos awareness campaign targeted at building maintenance, repair and refurbishment workers on 6 February 1995. Its initial phase comprised advertisements in the national press and in some trade journals and a press conference on 2 March 1995. In the second phase of the campaign over the coming months, HSE inspectors and other appropriate enforcement authorities will publicise the dangers of exposure to asbestos dust, especially in their visits to premises where building renovation work is carried out.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many start-up businesses were supported by the enterprise allowance scheme or any of its renamed successors in each of the last five years.

Mr. Paice: The number of start-ups in England supported by the enterprise allowance scheme, known as the business start-up scheme since 1992, are shown in the following table:

1989–90: 63,500
1990–91: 50,300
1991–92: 41,800
1992–93: 33,600
1993–94: 34,500

Industrial Accidents

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will be able to make an

announcement on whether he supports the proposal that the Health and Safety Executive should report data on industrial accidents to both the European Commission and the European Environment Agency.

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 28 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *557*.

Career Development Loans

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many career development loans were made in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Britain, between April 1993 and September 1994; what was their total value in each case; and what proportion of the total funds taken up by such loans for Britain was for lending in Wales.

Mr. Paice: Between April 1993 and September 1994, 17,607 career development loans with a total loan value of £52,074,087 were approved nationally.

This includes 656 loans approved in Wales with a total loan value of £1,929,244.50. This represents nearly 4 per cent. of the national total.

Disabled People

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to introduce legal forms of positive discrimination to enable companies to advertise for disabled employees specifically so that they could ensure that disabled quotas are reached.

Miss Widdecombe: Not enough people have chosen to register as disabled for all employers to meet the quota requirement. Employers are free to discriminate in favour of people with disabilities when recruiting; the Disability Discrimination Bill will not alter this position. The Bill will, however, make it unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person less favourably than other people because of their disability, unless there are justifiable reasons.

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what help his Department gives in making companies more aware of the benefits of employing disabled people.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has an on-going programme of education and persuasion designed to make employers aware of the benefits of employing disabled people. Placing, assessment and counselling teams promote the "Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People" to employers. As well as giving advice to employers about recruitment and general practices relating to the employment of people with disabilities, the code also includes information about the full and effective role of people with disabilities at work. The Department has also mounted advertising campaigns this year, and in the previous two years, focusing on demonstrating the abilities of disabled people at work.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *133–35*, if he will place in the Library *(a)* the memorandum on social clauses in trade agreements, *(b)* the resolution on implementation of legislation in the social field to be discussed at the EU Social Affairs Council on 27 March and *(c)* all relevant United Kingdom and EU documents pertaining thereto.

Miss Widdecombe: The presidency has not yet finalised the texts to be put to the Council. I shall be writing to the scrutiny committees about the state of play on these and other matters in advance of the Council. I shall place both documents in the Library when they become available.

Bereavement Leave

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much time an unemployed person is granted for bereavements, without being discounted as available for work.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Colin Pickthall, dated 14 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the amount of time an unemployed person is granted for bereavements, without being discounted as available for work.

It may help if I explain that the receipt of unemployment benefit, National Insurance contribution credits and income support when unemployed, is conditional upon a person being available for and actively seeking work. This means that the individual must be available to start work immediately; must not place such restrictions on the work they are willing to do as to leave them with no real prospects of finding a job; and must take those steps each week that offer them their best prospects of being offered work.

Availability is a daily condition which means that the client must be available to do some work on every day of claim, usually Monday to Saturday.

If a client declares to my people in local offices that they are not available for work for any day(s), Social Security regulations provide for their claim to be referred to an independent adjudication officer for a decision about entitlement.

However, my local office and section managers have some discretion in deciding whether a claim is referred or not. If a client is unable to attend on their normal signing day, or cannot attend a pre-arranged interview, because of a domestic crisis such as a bereavement, my people have discretion to treat the claim as straightforward, without reference to an adjudication officer. In such circumstances there are no time limits. I expect my people to use judgement and decide what is reasonable in the light of the circumstances of each case.

I hope this is helpful.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each standard region for each year since 1979 the average *(a)* hourly and *(b)* weekly (i) full-time and (ii) part-time (1) male and (2) female earnings, the total number and proportion of *(c)* male and *(d)* female (iii) part-time employees earning less than £5.88 per hour and (iv) full-time employees earning less than £221.50 per week, and the average weekly earnings of the top and bottom deciles of *(e)* full-time and *(f)* part-time, (v) male and (vi) female employees.

Mr. Oppenheim: Analyses by standard region of the new earnings survey results for full-time employees are published in part E of the report.

Tables 110 and 113 contain average gross weekly and hourly earnings, and the top and bottom deciles of weekly earnings, for men and women respectively.

Table 114 contains the sample numbers and the percentages with weekly earnings below a range of levels. These include £220 in 1994 but in 1979 the top of the range was £200 for men and £100 for women.

Table 115 contains similar information on a range of hourly earnings that included £6 per hour in 1994 but in 1979 the top of the range was £3.50 for men and £2.20 for women.

Information for part-time women is published in part F. Table 180 contains information similar to table 113 and table 175 contains information similar to table 115.

Copies of the new earnings survey reports can be found in the Library.

The information is not available for part-time men.

Workstart

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was *(a)* the number of places available each year, *(b)* the actual number taken up, *(c)* the number of people involved in the programme who are presently in employment and *(d)* the number of different employers involved in the programme, in respect of each pilot workstart programme.

Miss Widdecombe: Workstart was piloted in four areas between July 1993 and December 1994: Devon and Cornwall, Kent, Tyneside and south and south-west London. The figures requested are shown in the following table. All available places were taken up. In the survey of employers, published on 12 December 1994, over 80 per cent. of employers interviewed said they intended to keep the workstart employee on after the subsidy ended. The follow-up survey due to report in November 1995 will give more information on this matter. Five thousand places will be available on the further pilots, announced in the Budget, which will begin in April 1995.

Pilot	*(b) the number of places taken up*[1]	*(c) the number of people still participating*	*(d) the number of employers involved*[2]
Kent	468	238	380
Devon and Cornwall	626	433	309
Tyneside	243	137	130
South west and south London	238	108	144

[1] Figures February 1995.[2] Figures September 1994 (evaluation completed in September).

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March 1995.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is currently on an official visit to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan. He is also accompanied by a large delegation of British business men.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister who authorised the approach by police to the journalist, David Johnston, of Radio Forth, to be offered the facility of direct communication with the then Prime Minister, in order to induce him to reveal the source of certain information relating to Lockerbie in December 1988.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

As has been repeatedly made clear it is not appropriate for the investigating authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with Chancellor Kohl attempts by the Bundeskriminalamt and the Verfassungschütz to deflect blame for the Lockerbie crime from the Rhein-Main airport in Frankfurt, and the statement by the Bundesministerium of Justice on 20 February 1995 letter Geschäftzeichen 111 BLA 4038 E 634/88 about the absence of knowledge by the investigators of the public prosecutors office in Frankfurt of whether explosives which led to the crashing of the Pan Am plane got on board the feeder plane in Frankfurt am Main.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

No.

Mr. Dalyell: To aks the Prime Minister what assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to relatives of the British Lockerbie victims in their presentation of a petition to the European Parliament, drawing attention to six years of effort to find the truth about Lockerbie.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

We have received no request to assist in this matter.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Transportation

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if a vet from his Department was present at Shoreham port on the night of 6 March for the arrival of six cattle trucks;

(2) what assessment he has made of whether the transport plan for the six truckloads of cattle destined to leave from Shoreham port on the night of 6 March was capable of being fulfilled, and whether the cattle were rested, fed and watered after 15 hours; what happened to the cattle; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: A veterinary officer was at the port awaiting the arrival of six trucks containing calves. In the event, a demonstration prevented two livestock lorries already on their way to Shoreham from reaching the port. I understand that these lorries returned with the calves to the premises or origin in Oxfordshire. Officials were satisfied that all the animals could be returned to their home premises within the 15-hour limit by which time the animals would have had to be fed and rested.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what time loading commenced of a consignment of calves which arrived in Brightlingsea on 3 March on to the vehicle which transported them to Brightlingsea; how many calves were on the vehicles; at what time and from where the journey to Brightlingsea began; what time they arrived at the port; what subsequently happened to them; when feeding of all the calves was completed; what time the vessel designated to ship the calves to the continent arrived at Brightlingsea; what time loading of the vessel commenced; what time loading of the vessel completed, and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: I understand that the journey of the 194 calves began at 05.30 hours from premises in Kent. The lorry carrying calves arrived at a lairage near Harwich shortly after 10.00 hours where it waited until convoyed to the port, arriving at about 14.00 hours. The calves were fed aboard the lorry between 18.00 hours and 19.50 hours. The vessel berthed at 23.10 hours and the calves were loaded from 23.30 hours and fed immediately. All were aboard by 23.45 hours. Sheep were loaded between 23.45 and 01.20 hours.

The other four livestock lorries were at local lairages ready to load calves already resting there. In the circumstances, loading of those animals for Shoreham did not even begin.

Journey plans had been scrutinised by officials before the proposed export journeys started and were satisfactory.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the aggregate estimated annual cost of the Meat Hygiene Service;

(2) what is the aggregate annual cost of all Meat Hygiene Service staff in the financial year 1995–96.

Mrs. Browning: The total estimated cost of the Meat Hygiene Service in 1995–96 is £53.4 million. Within this figure, £26.5 million relates to the cost of employed staff—excluding relief cover for holidays, sickness and so on—and £10.2 million is for contracted veterinary services.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what protection has been written into staff contracts of employment to cover the eventuality that the Meat Hygiene Service does not receive parliamentary approval.

Mrs. Browning: Parliamentary approval is not required for the setting up of the Meat Hygiene Service, which will be an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Changes to secondary legislation are required to place responsibility for fresh meat and welfare enforcement on Ministers.

The majority of Meat Hygiene Service employees will be meat inspectors transferring from their local authority employers to the agency on 1 April 1995 in accordance with the provisions of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981.

Meat Hygiene Service staff employed by MAFF in advance of launch are subject to the Ministry's standard terms, which provide for three months notice or payment in lieu.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on what date the chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service was appointed;

(2) what is the total remuneration package for the chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service.

Mrs. Browning: The appointment of the chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service for an initial period of five years was announced on 19 May 1994 and he took up his post full time on 1 September 1994. The chief executive's annual salary is £70,000. In addition, he is eligible for an annual, non-pensionable performance-related bonus of up to 12.5 per cent. of basic pay.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (1) what is the total number of staff appointed to the Meat Hygiene Service;

(2) what is the ultimate complement of full-time and part-time staff to be appointed to the Meat Hygiene Service.

Mrs. Browning: At launch, the Meat Hygiene Service will employ 947 staff, comprising 872 meat inspectors and veterinarians and 75 management and support staff. Veterinary services will be obtained also through contracts with veterinary practices. The complement of the Meat Hygiene Service will be subject to adjustments to reflect any changes in the number of licensed fresh meat premises and the requirements of the relevant legislation.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (1) on what date it is proposed that the Meat Hygiene Service will become operational;

(2) on what date he made it his policy to establish the Meat Hygiene Service.

Mrs. Browning: In March 1992 the then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) announced the intention to create a national meat hygiene service, constituted as an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to take over the fresh meat hygiene enforcement currently carried out by local authorities.

The Meat Hygiene Service will become operational on 1 April 1995.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what premises have been acquired or leased by the Meat Hygiene Service.

Mrs. Browning: None. The Meat Hygiene Service is a minority occupier in Government offices in York, Cambridge, Wolverhampton, Taunton, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what subordinate legislation is required to give effect to the Meat Hygiene Service; and what is the timetable for its introduction.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer on 13 March 1995]:* Changes are needed to make Ministers responsible for the enforcement of fresh meat hygiene and welfare at slaughter legislation. The following regulations, which include other changes not relevant to the establishment of the Meat Hygiene Service, are being laid before Parliament to come into force on 1 April 1995:

The Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995

The Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 and

The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995.

The following regulations will provide for Ministers to enforce controls in fresh meat plants over unfit meat and bovine offals.

The Animal By Products (Identification) Regulations 1995, and

The Bovine Offal (Prohibition) (Amendment) Regulations 1995.

The Meat (Hygiene, Inspection and Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/361) were laid before Parliament on 17 February and will, mostly, come into operation on 1 April 1995. Regulations 12 and 13 of these regulations, which provide for formal consultation on charges, come into operation on 13 March 1995.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* negative and *(b)* affirmative statutory instruments have been laid by his Department in each year since 1970; what proportion of the negative statutory instruments were the subject of prayers for their annulment; and what proportions of those prayers were debated.

Mr. Jack: Figures can be provided only from the year 1986 onwards without incurring disproportionate costs. These are as follows:

Type of statutory instrument

Year	*Negative resolution*	*Affirmative resolution*
1986	78	19
1987	66	13
1988	57	11
1989	72	22
1990	91	14
1991	71	12
1992	98	6
1993	94	5
1994	108	6

It should be borne in mind that not all statutory instruments impose requirements on business and some amend, replace or revoke existing statutory instruments.

No central records are kept of the number of negative statutory instruments which were the subject of a prayer and therefore no information can be supplied on the proportion debated.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the consultants, *(b)* the tasks for which they were employed and *(c)* the payments made to them from the budget of his Department in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Jack: Details of consultants employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the years 1992–93 and 1993–94 and their tasks and of consultants employed by MAFF's executive agencies will be placed in the Library. The total cost to MAFF and the agencies in each year is as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £
MAFF (excluding ITD)	1,903,204	1,988,234
Information Technology Division	5,200,000	8,300,000
ADAS	387,000	985,845
Central Veterinary Laboratory	546,833	463,037
Central Science Laboratory	17,100	149,731
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	41,272	34,281
Pesticides Safety Directorate	—	170,469
Total	8,095,409	12,091,597

Agriculture, Harrogate

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people were employed in agriculture in the Harrogate borough council area in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Jack: The number of persons employed in agriculture in the local government district of Harrogate at June in each of the years from 1987 to 1994 is given in the table. Data for earlier years are not available.

Number of person employed in agriculture in the Harrogate LGD 1987 to 1994

Year	*Number*
1987	4,777
1988	4,738
1989	4,571
1990	4,457
1991	4,362
1992	4,285
1993	4,256
1994	4,162

Source:

June Census of Agriculture and Horticulture.

Notes:

1. Data relates to main holdings (minor holdings excluded).

2. Figures include all categories of workers—i.e. farmers, partners, directors (including spouses); salaried managers; hired workers; family workers; seasonal or casual workers.

Bio-fuel

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current estimated figures in hectares of land under crops used for bio-fuel purposes; what were the figures in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The main crop sources for bio-fuels are oilseed rape and short rotation coppice.

Prior to 1993 and the introduction of the arable area payments scheme oilseed rape grown for non-food uses was not recorded separately. In 1993, 24,087 hectares of oilseed rape, excluding high erucic acid rape grown primarily for use as a slipping agent, was planted on

set-aside land for non-food outlets and oil produced will mainly have been used for bio-fuels and in pharmaceuticals. In 1994 this had risen to 78,402 hectares.

There is no scheme information on the amount of short rotation coppice grown for bio-fuels but it is estimated that in 1993 90 hectares had been planted for this purpose, and increased to 230 hectares in 1994. Under the third order under the non-fossil fuel obligation, NFFO 3, it is expected that over the next few years 5,000 to 7,000 hectares of short rotation coppice could be established.

The use of agricultural crops are renewable raw materials for industry and energy is a new development which the Government are keen to foster.

Milk

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of milk quota is currently owned by persons who are not active dairy farmers; and if he will make a statement

Mr. Jack: The intervention board keeps a record of individual producer's milk quota but not their milk production. Information on the percentage of milk quota owned by non-producing quota holders is therefore not available.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are currently being taken in respect of the black market in milk.

Mr. Jack: The industry has taken excellent advantage of the intervention board's fraud freephone and provided many reports of trading in black market milk. The agency's team of investigators are vigorously following up a number of leads.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible, in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production publication and distribution and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 2 march 1995]:* In respect of those White Papers, Green Papers and other publications published by HMSO all costs are borne by HMSO who aim to recover these from sales revenue. In addition, MAFF produces a wide range of reports, information booklets and other publications which are listed in the Department's publications catalogue, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. The cost of producing, publishing and distributing such material in 1994–95 is expected to be about £2.2 million. Expenditure relating to all individual items could be ascertained only at disproportionate cost, but I should be happy to provide the hon. Member with further details relating to any publications in which he is particularly interested.

Publications produced by MAFF agencies are the responsibility of their chief executives. I have asked them to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Figures for 1980 are not available in a comparable form.

Letter from Dr. P. I. Stanley to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 13 March 1995:

EXPENDITURE IN 1994 BY MAFF AND ITS AGENCIES ON WHITE PAPERS, GREEN PAPERS AND PAMPHLETS

No White Papers or Green Papers were published by the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) in 1994. However the Agency produced several information pamphlets including a Statement of Standards and several information pamphlets including a Statement of Standards and Quality of Service. The total cost of producing, publishing and distributing such material in the 1994–95 financial year is about £9,500.

CSL was launched as an executive agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on 1 April 1992 and therefore no comparable figure is available for 1980, when CSL formed part of the Department.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 13 March 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about White Papers, Green Papers and Pamphlets issued by Agencies in 1994.

CVL publishes a number of pamphlets aimed at assisting the marketing of its services. In 1994 the cost of production of these items was £8,900 including VAT. The material is distributed in a wide variety of ways including handing-out at conferences and exhibitions, mailed with other material or collected from CVL Reception. Costs of distribution are not therefore kept separately.

CVL became an Agency in 1990 and so it is not possible to provide comparable costs with 1980 when CVL was part of the Department.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 13 March 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate, to your question about expenditure on selected publications.

The Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) has not produced any White papers or Green papers in 1994/95. It has produced two pamphlets; one setting out our customer service standards and one describing the work of the agency. The cost of producing these pamphlets was £1,655. Costs of other pamphlets with a wider Food Safety emphasis have been borne centrally and therefore covered in the return from MAFF.

As PSD was established as an agency on 1 April 1993 comparable figures for 1980 are not available.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 6 March 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the cost of the production, publication and distribution of certain publications by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The Directorate was not established as a Next Steps Agency until 2 April 1990, nor does it issue any white papers or green papers. In 1994, the VMD issued the following pamphlets:

Sheep Dipping— published jointly in May 1994 with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Department of the Environment. Production costs were met by the HSE, but the VMD paid for the distribution of copies to the 90,000 registered sheep farmers in the UK. The total cost of this distribution was £22,153.62.

VMD Customer Service Statement— published in July 1994. The total production and distribution costs for 7,000 copies was £3,453.13.

Two further pamphlets were published in house during 1994 at no extra cost.

AMELIA 1— Provisional Marketing Authorisations.

(A guidance note on new authorisation arrangements for veterinary medicines published in September 1994).

Veterinary Medicinal Products (Dips, injectables, pour ons and sprays) available in the UK for use as ectoparasiticides in sheep—

(Published in December 1994).

Letter from Guy Stapleton to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 13 March 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about publications issued by the Ministry and MAFF-related agencies, as the information for the Intervention Board is a matter within my operational responsibility.

In 1994 HMSO published the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts 1993–94; the cost of copies for general sale was borne by HMSO, but the Intervention Board paid £12,500 for producing copies for the Agency's use. HMSO also published the Intervention Board's Annual Report for 1980 (Cmnd 8283). No expenditure was incurred by the Board.

The Agency itself publishes a range of scheme and information leaflets. These are listed in our Annual Reports, which are available in the Library of the House. Printing costs in 1994 were £28,225. Figures for 1980 are not available in a comparable form.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Walsh to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 13 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Minister of Agriculture to reply direct to you concerning the question you tabled on Thursday 2nd March. In this you asked for a list of all white papers, green papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies, in 1994, giving in each case, the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution. You also required the total equivalent cost in 1980.

As an Agency, ADAS has not produced any white papers, green papers or equivalent pamphlets. ADAS was formed as an executive agency in 1992 so no comparison would be possible with the year 1980. ADAS continues to produce a number of leaflets in support of the marketing related to its commercial activity.

Lambs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has put forward in the European Council of Ministers to eliminate the additional grants available for slaughtering in continental countries, after a short period of residency, of lambs reared in Wales but which thereafter qualify as lambs of these other countries and benefit from grant eligibility for which they would not have qualified had they been slaughtered in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I am not aware that any member state of the EU is paying slaughter premiums on lambs slaughtered in its abattoirs. Such premiums would distort competition and constitute an illegal state aid. I would not hesitate to encourage the Commission to take action in the face of evidence that any such grants were paid.

Welsh lamb slaughtered in, say, France currently attracts a premium price on the market as compared with Welsh lamb exported to France in carcase form. This is because lambs slaughtered in France carry a French health stamp and can legitimately be described as "home killed", whatever their origin.

The Meat and Livestock Commission is making every effort to promote the image of British carcase meat exports on EU markets and has the full support of the Government in doing so.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many lambs were sold to market from farms in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales in each of the past five years; and how many of the lambs from each country were exported.

Mr. Jack: The total number of United Kingdom lamb marketings are given in the following table. These are then broken down by those slaughtered in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and those exported live from the UK as a whole.

The number of lambs exported live is not broken down below the UK level.

Lamb marketings 1989 to 1994

thousand head

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total UK Lamb marketings[1]	18,296	18,564	19,937	18,840	17,892	n/a
of which;						
Lamb Slaughterings[2]						
England	12,130	12,556	13,315	12,349	11,345	11,062
Wales	2,177	2,102	2,276	1,673	1,868	1,705
Scotland	2,815	2,787	3,048	2,989	3,104	3,271
Northern Ireland	731	733	617	955	978	776
UK	17,853	18,177	19,255	17,966	17,295	16,814
Live exports[3] UK	442	386	681	874	597	n/a

[1] Home killed slaughter plus recorded live exports.[2] Home killed slaughter of other sheep and lambs.
[3] *Source:*
1989–1992 Central Statistical Office, 1993 MDS Transmodal. Sheep under 1 year.
1993 data, based on the new system of recording trade between EU countries (Intrastat),are provisional. They are thought to under-recorded the true level of exports.
Data for 1994 are not yet available.
Live exports are not broken down below the UK level.

Alkaloids in Foods

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what research his Department is currently funding or initiating into the effects of pyrrolizidine alkaloids in foods: who is undertaking that research: what is its purpose: and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is currently funding one project at the university of Glasgow on pyrrolizidine alkaloids in foods. The project will study the relative toxicities of different pyrrolizidine alkaloids and should improve assessment of risk from ingestion of these alkaloids. Results of recent surveillance of levels of pyrrolizidine alkaloids in UK honey were published in the February edition of the Food Safety Information Bulletin.

Juice Plus

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what correspondence has

been exchanged or received by or between Ministers in his Department in the last three years on the use, distribution or approval of Juice Plus.

Mrs. Browning: None.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of cases of food poisoning reported from *(a)* salmonella and *(b)* campylobacter in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

Data for 1981 to 1993 are published in the Steering Group on the Microbiological Safety of Food Annual Report 1993, copies of which are available in the Library.

The confirmed total for 1993 for all salmonellas is 30,654 and the provisional figure for 1994 is 30,427.

The provisional figure for 1994 for campylobacter is 44,315. The 1993 figure is still provisional at 39,383.

Anthrax

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of anthrax have been reported in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: The number of confirmed cases of anthrax reported in England for the years in question is:

1985: 1
1986: 7
1987: 3
1988: 3
1989: 3
1990: 3
1991: 1
1992: 1
1993: 1
1994: 3

NATIONAL HERITAGE

VAT (Accommodation)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to press for a reduction in value added tax rates in the accommodation sector, following the report by McKinsey Inc.

Mr. Dorrell: The McKinsey study concluded that the effect of a reduction in VAT on our tourism revenues would be uncertain. It is not clear that taxation places our operators at a competitive disadvantage without comparing the total tax burden on them with that carried by their European competitors, who have to bear the costs of the social chapter; and it is not clear that the benefits of a VAT reduction would be passed on to customers. I intend to help the accommodation sector improve value for money by means of the measures I announced on 1 March.

Children's Play

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many responses he received with regard to the restructuring of children's play, showing *(a)* the total number of responses, *(b)* the number of responses, (i) in favour of creating a national body and (ii) opposing the creation of a new national body and *(c)* the number of responses (1) in favour of extending national lottery funding to children's play activities and (2) opposing the extension of national lottery funding to children's play activities.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has received a total of 135 responses regarding future arrangements for children's play. Sixty-five of the individuals and organisations which responded were in favour of the creation of a national body and 24 were in favour of children's play activities being eligible for national lottery funding. None of the responses opposed either of these ideas.

English Heritage Commission

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1165*, who replaced Sir Hugh Cubitt when his appointment as a member of the English Heritage Commission ended on 31 December; and if regard was given in making this appointment, to the desirability of at least one member of this commission having knowledge of local government.

Mr. Dorrell: I am currently considering new appointments to the English Heritage Commission, including a replacement for Sir Hugh Cubitt, and will give due regard to the desirability of at least one member having knowledge of local government when making these appointments.

Cultural Property Ownership

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement about the negotiations to be held next June in Rome when the final draft of a treaty on cultural property ownership will be considered; and what is his assessment of their effect on the buying and selling of antiquities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* I can confirm that there will be a diplomatic conference in Rome from 7 to 24 June this year, to discuss the draft Unidroit convention on the international return of stolen or illegally exported cultural objects. It is our present intention that the UK will be represented. As the convention will be subject to further amendment at the conference, I cannot anticipate whether the UK will become a signatory or what effect its provision might have on the buying and selling of antiquities in the United Kingdom.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Tranquilliser Addiction

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to provide legal aid to help people addicted to tranquillisers to pursue their cases against drug companies.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Civil legal aid is available for almost all proceedings through the courts of England and Wales, subject to tests as to the means of the applicant,

and the merits of his or her case. Decisions on the grant or refusal of civil legal aid are taken by the Legal Aid Board, and I cannot intervene in its decisions.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases are currently being pursued in the courts by people addicted to tranquillisers against drug companies.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not available centrally.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Former Prisoners of War

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what backing Her Majesty's Ambassador in Tokyo gave to former British prisoners of war of the Japanese when they visited Japan recently to claim compensation for their treatment and that of other prisoners of the Japanese in the second world war.

Mr. Goodlad: The Ambassador met and briefed the former prisoners during their visit to Japan. He helped them to meet a representative of the Japanese Government and to pay tribute to their fallen comrades at the Commonwealth war graves cemetery.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will define what he means by the word "dud" in his reply to the Adjournment debate on 1 February, referring to a document of air intelligence unit of the US air force in relation to payment by Ali Akbar Mostashemi to terrorist groups for a contract to bomb an airliner.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: When the report in question was assessed, it was found to be no more than an unsubstantiated rumour of no intelligence value.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will submit to the Committee on Intelligence the transcripts of conversations, in 1988, between Iranian Government officials recording their satisfaction with the Lockerbie explosion.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we do not comment on such matters.

Embassy, Berlin

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to develop the British embassy in Berlin; what is the estimated value of the present site; what is the projected cost of the redevelopment work; how many staff will be employed in the embassy; how much office space, residential accommodation and what recreational and restaurant facilities will be provided; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We own the site of the former embassy in Berlin, destroyed during world war two. Its value is estimated at £11 million. The cost of construction of a new building on that site together with the cost of an adjoining site which is being acquired, is estimated at £21 million. This will enable a fully functioning embassy to be built and provide office accommodation for 80 UK-based and 80 local staff. No residential accommodation will be built. A staff canteen, recreation room and library will be provided. Conference and exhibition facilities will also be provided for use by British exporters and other organisations.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sites were considered for the new British embassy in Berlin; who made the decision on the site and on what advice; what provisional arrangements will be made and at what cost to ensure the effective continuation of the embassy's work during the period of redevelopment; and for how long it is expected to last.

Mr. Goodlad: Various possibilities were considered for the establishment of a new embassy in Berlin. The most cost-effective option was chosen. The decision we took was to construct a new building on a site we already part owned.

The work of the British embassy will continue in Bonn and at the present British embassy, Berlin office, at 32/34 Unter den Linden, until the opening of the new building, planned for early 1999, when staff will be transferred.

Social Development Summit

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the world summit for social development which was held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The world summit for social development provided an opportunity for discussion of the key development issues of poverty reduction, job creation and improving social cohesion, and for ideas to be shared at a high level on how these problems might be overcome. My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey represented the Government and made a keynote speech setting out the Government's good record on tackling problems of poverty and unemployment at home, and our support through the aid programme for developing countries' efforts to achieve sustainable people-centred development

The Government are pleased that the summit's documentation includes strong references to human rights, good governance, developing country debt, trade liberalisation and the need for economic growth.

EDUCATION

Local Education Authority Budgets

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each local education authority budgeted spending for 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on local authorities' budgets for 1995–96 will become available centrally later in the year.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is the average level of hold-back from local education authority educational budgets for local authorities controlled by *(a)* Conservative, *(b)* Labour and *(c)* Liberal Democrat administrations;

(2) what is the level of hold-back within the expenditure of the Coventry education authority;

(3) what is the level of hold-back within the education expenditure of *(a)* Coventry, *(b)* Solihull, *(c)* Birmingham, *(d)* Warwickshire, *(e)* Wandsworth, *(f)* Westminster, *(g)* Sandwell, *(h)* Wolverhampton and *(i)* Walsall local education authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire: The percentage of the potential schools budget retained centrally for 1994–95 by the LEAs in question is as follows:[1]

	Percentage
Coventry	12.9
Solihull	9.6
Birmingham	13.2
Warwickshire	14.3
Wandsworth[2]	17.7
Westminster	11.5
Sandwell	13.5
Wolverhampton	11.3
Walsall	12.3

[1] The figures are taken from the answer given on 17 October 1994 to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) *Official Report*, columns *27–36*.

[2] In the case of the inner London authorities (other than Westminster) the introduction of local management of Schools was deferred until April 1992, and the delegation requirements applicable to those authorities differ from those applicable elsewhere.

I will write to my hon. Friend about average hold-back by LEAs according to political control.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many education authorities have made representations that their budgets of 1995–96 are insufficient for their *(a)* education and *(b)* youth services.

Mr. Robin Squire: My colleagues and I have received representations from a large number of local education authorities about aspects of their budgets for 1995–96.

European Proposals

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the state of negotiation of the EC SOCRATES and Youth for Europe III proposals.

Mr. Boswell: Both proposals were finally adopted at the Council of Ministers' meeting on 10 March. The Council agreed that the SOCRATES decision should contain a finance article setting the programme's budget at 850 million ECU—£689 million[1]—over five years, subject to neutral review by the Council and the European Parliament after two years. A finance article was also agreed for Youth for Europe III setting its budget at 126 million ECU—£102 million—over five years. The proposals had previously been approved by the European Parliament on 1 March.

SOCRATES is the first major European Union initiative to encourage practical co-operation at all levels of education across Europe. While each member state will keep its distinctive education system, schools will benefit from developing new partnerships with schools from other European countries. These partnerships will particularly help children learning the languages of the European Union.

In addition, there will be continuing support throughout the education system for teachers, colleges and universities, including continuation of the ERASMUS programme. I hope, later this month, to launch the national agencies which will distribute money to institutions which bid successfully.

[1] converted at 1 ECU = £0.8103.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many applications for loans the Student Loans Company received for the year 1994–95; how many were accepted; and how many of these have not yet been paid to the applicant.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Nursery Education

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *392*, how much Government proposals on the provision of nursery education will cost *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Norfolk in 1995–96.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been consulting a wide range of practitioners and professionals to inform the development of detailed proposals on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's commitment to provide, over time, a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish to take it up. The nature of the proposals will determine the costs.

Schools (Transfers)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools are being transferred from Hereford and Worcester local education authority to Birmingham local education authority from April.

Mr. Robin Squire: Five.

Birmingham LEA

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the total capital allocation for education to Birmingham local education authority since 1984–85; what has been the actual capital expenditure on education in Birmingham in the same period; and what information she has on the cost of dealing with the backlog in repairs and renovations in Birmingham's schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The total capital allocation for education and actual capital expenditure on education in Birmingham has been as follows:

£ million

	County and controlled schools[1]	*Voluntary aided schools*[3]	*Total allocation*	*Actual outturn*[4]
1984–85	[2]6.5	0.2	6.7	[7]—
1985–86	3.7	1.1	4.8	9.9
1986–87	5.0	0.6	5.6	7.5
1987–88	3.9	1.0	4.9	7.5
1988–89	4.4	1.8	6.2	5.5
1989–90	5.2	2.0	7.2	10.7
1990–91	[5]10.5	1.2	11.7	14.7
1991–92	11.1	1.1	12.2	14.9

£ million

	County and controlled schools[1]	Voluntary aided schools[5]	Total allocation	Actual outturn[6]
1992–93	10.9	1.8	12.7	13.4
1993–94	[4]6.2	1.4	7.6	[8]13.3
1994–95	10.9	1.1	12.0	[9]—
1995–96	9.2	0.4	9.6	[9]—

Notes:

[1] All totals given relate to the announced annual allocations only, and therefore exclude any supplementary funding, either in the form of supplementary credit approvals (post-1990), or prescribed additional funding (pre-1990).

[2] Figures up to and including 1989–90 represent annual notional capital allocations. The figures prior to 1993–94 also include an element of further education and sixth-form college funding.

[3] The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 introduced annual capital guidelines as a means of allocating borrowing power to local education authorities. This took effect from 1 April 1990.

[4] The establishment of the Further Education Funding Council in 1993 resulted in the separate determination of funding for further education and sixth-form colleges. ACG figures from 1993–94 therefore exclude this area of funding.

[5] Figures for voluntary aided education are as originally announced. They exclude any later allocations made in the year as a result of, for example, the approval of statutory proposals.

[6] Figures are derived from capital outturn returns submitted by LEAs to the Department of the Environment. Capital expenditure represents gross outturn on all areas of education, including the urban programme.

[7] Department of Environment data not available.

[8] 1993–94 figure provisional only.

[9] Figures relate to financial years. As 1994–95 FY is not yet complete, figures are not available after 1993–94.

Expenditure on repairs and renovations is a matter for the LEA.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many surplus school places there are in Devon.

Mr. Robin Squire: There were 9,032—10 per cent.—primary surplus school places and 4,160—7 per cent.—secondary surplus school places in LEA maintained schools in Devon in January 1994. Data on surplus places in grant-maintained schools in Devon are not available.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the number of surplus school places proposed to be removed as a result of local education authority reorganisation plans submitted to her which were *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected by her as a consequence of a parallel proposal for grant maintained status for each year since 1990.

Mr. Robin Squire: In case where there were both proposals to cease to maintain a school and parallel proposals for grant-maintained status, the table shows for each year since 1990 the school capacity proposed to be removed by local education authority school reorganisation plans which were *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected and the proposals for grant-maintained status approved.

Year proposals published	(a) Closure approved	(b) GM application approved
1990	2,440	5,046
1991	4,547	3,504
1992	6,302	0
1993	5,259	1,278
1994	241	37

Secondary Schools

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what proportion of pupils attended *(a)* state and *(b)* independent secondary schools in (i) 1979, (ii) 1985 and (iii) 1992;

(2) what proportion of pupils attended *(a)* state and *(b)* independent primary schools in (i) 1979, (ii) 1985 and (iii) 1993.

Mr. Robin Squire: The percentage of pupils attending maintained primary and secondary schools and independent schools in England for the years requested is shown in the table. Independent schools are not classified into primary and secondary schools.

Percentage of pupils attending maintained primary and secondary schools[1] and independent schools in England 1979, 1985, 1992 and 1993

position in January each year

	Maintained schools		Independent schools
	Primary	Secondary	
1979	50	42	6
1985	48	44	7
1992	54	37	7
1993	54	37	7

[1] Excluding sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from April 1993.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the independent schools that have entered the grant-maintained sector, excluding religious schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: To date, no independent schools have entered the grant-maintained sector under the provisions introduced last year by the Education Act 1993. A number of non-denominational independent schools have expressed an interest or sought further information.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action she is taking to encourage independent schools to enter the state sector of education.

Mr. Robin Squire: Recent changes to the law now allow independent schools to apply to join the grant-maintained sector. Guidance on this has been made available to interested parties. All proposals which come forward are considered on their merits.

Schools (Costs)

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current difference between the average annual cost of a secondary place in the state

sector, and the average annual fees for a day place in the private sector.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average spending per pupil in local education authority maintained secondary schools in England is estimated to be £2,250 in the financial year 1993–94. Comprehensive data from which the average annual fees for a day place in the independent sector could be calculated are not collected centrally; but the average fee charged for pupils in the assisted places scheme in the academic year 1993–94 was £4,112. For various reasons, however, the two figures quoted are not directly comparable, not least because the figure for maintained schools excludes significant items of school-related expenditure.

Hampshire County Council

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the expenditure of Hampshire county council on education each year since 1979 expressed in cash terms, real terms and as a real terms percentage increase or decrease on 1979 and on the previous year.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows total expenditure by Hampshire local education authority from 1979–80 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available, in cash and real terms, together with the percentage increases on 1979 and on the previous year. These figures have not been adjusted for any changes of function.

Gross education expenditure from 1979–80

Hampshire county council	*Gross expenditure (cash terms)*	*Gross expenditure (1994–95 prices)*	*Percentage increase on 1979–80 in real terms*	*Percentage increase on previous year in real terms*
1979–80	254,781	638,033	—	—
1980–81	304,603	644,688	1.0	1.0
1981–82	333,658	643,896	0.9	–0.1
1982–83	352,599	635,212	–0.4	–1.3
1983–84	366,578	631,124	–1.1	–0.6
1984–85	379,401	621,948	–2.5	–1.5
1985–86	397,771	618,174	–3.1	–0.6
1986–87	427,445	644,837	1.1	4.3
1987–88	470,240	673.536	5.6	4.5
1988–89	515,039	691,437	8.4	2.7
1989–90	516,959	648,703	1.7	–6.2
1990–91	558,882	649,285	1.8	0.1
1991–92	638,522	697,950	9.4	7.5
1992–93	698,227	733,984	15.0	5.2
1993–94[1]	581,475	593,105	–7.0	–19.2

[1] Provisional figures.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of pupils attended selective grammar schools in *(a) 1979, (b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Robin Squire: The percentages of pupils who attended maintained grammar schools in England in the years requested are shown in the table.

Percentages of pupils who attended maintained grammar schools in England

Position in January each year

	Percentage
1979	4.8
1985	3.7
1992	4.1

Class Sizes

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the average class sizes in *(a)* state secondary and *(b)* independent schools in (i) 1979, (ii) 1985 and (iii) 1993.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average size of single teacher classes in maintained secondary schools in England for the years requested is shown in the table. Information on the size of classes in independent schools is not held centrally.

Average size of single teacher classes in maintained secondary schools[1] in England

Position in January each year

	Class size
1979	21.2
1985	20.6
1993	21.2

[1] Excluding sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from April 1993.

DEFENCE

Euro 2000 Plane

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the allocation of work on the Euro 2000 plane to each country involved, relative to their share of planes ordered;

(2) how many Euro 2000 planes have been ordered by each participating country.

Mr. Freeman: The partner nations in the Eurofighter 2000 project agreed in 1988 that workshares in the development phase should be Germany 33 per cent., Italy 21 per cent., Spain 13 per cent. and the United Kingdom 33 per cent. These were based on declared offtakes of Germany 250, Italy 165, Spain 100 and United Kingdom

250 aircraft. Firm commitments and consequent workshare allocations for the production phase have yet to be decided.

St. Helenians

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what correspondence there has been between his Department and defence contractors employing St. Helenians to work on the Falkland Islands about payment or other treatment of St. Helenians on a differential basis from British ex-patriates; and if he will place copies of that correspondence in the Library.

Mr. Freeman: A search has failed to bring to light any correspondence between my Department and the contractors in question about the conditions of employment of St. Helenians in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policy he has for ensuring that the contractors employed to work at the Falkland Islands garrison do not discriminate on a racist basis in the payment of salaries.

Mr. Freeman: Two Ministry of Defence contractors, Turners Ltd. and Kelvins International Services, employ St. Helenian workers in the Falkland Islands. Both contracts contain a non-discrimination clause.

Gulf War

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what biological weapons detection assets were employed by Her Majesty's armed forces during the Gulf war.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 March 1995:

QUESTION 5, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what biological weapons detection assets were employed by Her Majesty's Armed Forces during the Gulf War, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The biological weapons detection assets deployed with the UK Armed Forces during the Gulf conflict comprised:

a. The nine Biological Detection Systems which provided a capability to detect the presence of biological warfare agent in the atmosphere.

b. Stand-by Assay Kits which were deployed both with the Biological Detection Systems and separately. The Stand-by Assay Kits provided a capability to analyse swab samples for the presence of biological warfare agent.

c. SIBCA kits. Sampling and Identification of Biological and Chemical Agent (SIBCA) kits were deployed with the UK Armed Forces to the Gulf. These kits would have been used to obtain samples from a suspected attack. A chain of custody would have been provided for the return of the samples to the United Kingdom for analysis at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the United States Department of Defence nuclear, biological, and chemical log from the Gulf war, specifically of those incidents cited on *(a)* 18 January 1991 at 05.00 hours, *(b)* 19 January 1991 at (i) 04.30 hours and (ii) 16.10 hours, *(c)* 20 January 1991 at (i) 17.10 hours and (ii) 22.40 hours, *(d)* 3 March 1991 at (i) 15.15 hours, (ii) 18.10 hours and (iii) 18.20 hours and *(e)* 12 March 1991 at (i) 16.20 hours and (ii) 17.40 hours; and if he will make a statement;

(2) on what occasions information on chemical weapons compiled by monitoring teams during the Gulf War has been shared by the allies.

Mr. Soames: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 March 1995:

QUESTIONS 4 AND 6, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what assessment he has made of the United States Department of Defence Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) Log from the Gulf War, specifically of those incidents cited on (a) 18 January 1991 at 0500 hours, (b) 19 January 1991 at (i) 0430 hours and (ii) 1610 hours, (c) 20 January 1991 at (i) 1710 hours and (ii) 2240 hours (d) 3 March 1991 at (i) 1515 hours, (ii) 1810 hours and (iii) 1820 hours and (e) 12 March 1991 at (i) 1620 hours and (ii) 1740 hours; and if he will make a statement and on what occasions information on chemical weapons compiled by monitoring teams during the Gulf War has been shared by the Allies, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The United States Department of Defence Nuclear Biological and Chemical log from the Gulf conflict was drawn upon by the US Department of Defence in preparing material used to brief the US Defence Science Board Task Force on Persian Gulf War Health Effects. An abbreviated selection of chemical/biological incidents extracted from these logs is contained in Appendix B, pages 1–6 of the report of the Defence Science Board issued in June 1994.

4. As Director General and Chief Executive of CBDE Porton Down, I was invited to attend and participated as a specialist adviser to the Defence Science Board Task Force on Persian Gulf War Health Effects and was therefore present at the briefings to the Defence Science Board by the Department of Defence on the incidents reported in the US Department of Defence NBC log from the Gulf conflict and summarised in Appendix B to the Defence Science Board Task Force. The Defence Science Board Task Force concluded that they had found no evidence that either chemical or biological warfare was deployed at any level against the coalition forces or that there were any exposures of US Service members to chemical or biological warfare agents in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. The Task Force noted that they were aware of one soldier who was blistered, plausibly from mustard gas, after entering a bunker in Iraq during the post-war period. The report noted that the one plausible injury occurred during inspection and demolition of Iraqi bunkers and stated that "It seemed to be the result of accidental contact of the soldier with contaminated soil in a bunker that may have been used previously, (probably during the Iran-Iraq war) for storing mustard".

5. The United Kingdom and the United States utilised a wide range of detectors so as to provide warning to our forces prior to exposure to a harmful concentration of agent. Such detectors are sensitive and there are carefully laid down procedures in the event of any single detector alarming for checks to be carried out so as to determine whether an alarm was indeed caused by a chemical or biological weapon attack. The incidents cited from the US Department of Defence NBC log from the Gulf conflict did not result in any confirmation that chemical or biological warfare agents had been used by Iraq against the coalition forces. The coalition forces in the Gulf War had arrangements whereby, had there been a

confirmed chemical or biological weapons attack in one area, this information would have been between the Allies and, in particular, appropriate warning would have been given to other units of the coalition forces in the hazard area. It is clear from examination of the US Department of Defence NBC log from the Gulf conflict that there was sharing of information on unconfirmed alarms arising from chemical or biological weapons detectors during the Gulf War with coalition forces. However, there was no confirmed use of chemical or biological warfare agents during the Gulf conflict.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his American counterpart concerning the use of chemical weapons during the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clarke, dated 14 March 1995:

QUESTION 7, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what recent discussions he has had with his American counterpart concerning the use of chemical weapons during the Gulf War; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The Ministry of Defence has had continuing discussions with the US Department of Defence concerning the Gulf conflict. Officials have participated in the US Defence Science Board Task Force on Persian Gulf Health Effects which was briefed by the US and by the UK participant on whether there was any evidence, which there was not, to suggest that chemical weapons had been used in the Gulf conflict. The UK view continues to be that there was no evidence of the use of chemical or biological weapons by Iraq against the coalition forces during the Gulf conflict.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of *(a)* allied air raids on Iraqi chemical weapons installations during the Gulf war and *(b)* whether chemical agents could have been released into the atmosphere as a result of these raids; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 March 1995:

QUESTION 8, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what assessment he has made of *(a)* Allied air raids on Iraqi chemical weapons installations during the Gulf War and *(b)* whether chemical agents could have been released into the atmosphere as a result of these raids; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The Ministry of Defence during Operation GRANBY made assessments of the potential hazard to Service personnel resulting from the Allied bombing of Iraqi targets at which chemical weapons were produced or stored. These assessment were based on various assumptions for the quantity of agent that might be released as a result of a bombing attack and for the associated meteorological conditions. The result of the assessment indicated that even assuming simultaneous release of the majority of agent from several bunkers under meteorological conditions which favoured the downwind travel of the agent cloud and ignoring the fact that chemical agents are organic materials which are destroyed by combustion, the maximum distance at which there would be any hazard was of the order of a few tens of kilometres. In practice, simultaneous release is unlikely to occur, agent will be destroyed by combustion and meteorological conditions will be less favourable resulting in a significantly reduced downwind hazard distance.

4. Whilst chemical agents could have been released into the atmosphere as a result of the Allied air raids, there is no evidence to indicate that the resulting concentrations of agent in the atmosphere resulted in any harm to Iraqi personnel at those installations or in their vicinity, let alone the Allied Forces some hundreds of kilometres away from those installations.

Iraq (Chemical Weapons)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has received any evidence concerning current Iraqi chemical weapons capabilities.

Mr. Soames: My Department continues to assimilate evidence on current Iraqi chemical weapons capabilities from a number of sources, including the published reports by the UN Special Commission.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when sand suspected of carrying traces of chemical weapons or radioactivity was sent to Britain from *(a)* Israel, *(b)* Saudi Arabia, *(c)* Kuwait and *(d)* Iraq for testing at CBDE Porton Down.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 March 1995:

QUESTION 10, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when sand suspected of carrying traces of chemical weapons or radioactivity was sent to Britain from *(a)* Israel, *(b)* Saudi Arabia, *(c)* Kuwait and *(d)* Iraq for testing at CBDE Porton Down has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. Information on the analysis of samples collected from Iraq and sent to CBDE Porton Down was provided in the Official Report, 2 March 1995, columns 684–686; the samples analysed at CBDE Porton Down were described as soil samples although they are likely to contain varying quantities of sand. Some of the samples analysed in support of the United Special Commission (UNSCOM) on Iraq were in support of an investigation of the alleged use of chemical weapons against the Marsh Arabs in southern Iraq.

4. No sand suspected of carrying traces of chemical warfare agents have been sent from Israel, Saudi Arabia or Kuwait to CBDE Porton Down for analysis. No sand suspected of carrying traces of radioactivity from any of the countries named have been sent for testing at CBDE Porton Down.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received confirming the detection of chemical weapons use during the 1990–91 Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 March 1995:

Question 13, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your parliamentary question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what reports he has received confirming the detection of chemical weapons use during the 1990–91 Gulf War; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. Although during the 1990–91 Gulf conflict there were unconfirmed reports of the detection of chemical warfare agents, no confirmed reports of the detection of chemical warfare agents have been received.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the report by the Ministry of Defence of Czech Republic stating that chemical weapons were used by Iraq during the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 March 1995:

QUESTION 14, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what assessment he has made of the report by the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic stating that chemical weapons were used by Iraq during the Gulf War, and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The report made by the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic described the participation of the Czechoslovak anti-chemical unit in the Persian Gulf conflict. The Czech report stated that:

> "On the basis of the stated facts it is possible to pronounce the conclusion that the event cannot be linked in any way with the use of chemical weapons, that is, their application in combat actions and that harm to individuals of the Czechoslovak anti-chemical unit influenced by toxic combat substances could not have occurred".

In addition, we are aware that the United States Department of Defence has reviewed carefully the reports of the Czech detections. The US Department of Defence has recently concluded that they were unable to validate the Czech reports and state that the Czechs themselves never were able to identify the source of their detections. The UK conclusion continues to be that chemical weapons were not used by Iraq during the Gulf conflict.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussion he has had with his Czech counterpart concerning the use of chemical weapons during the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical, and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 March 1995:

QUESTION 15, ORDER PAPER 9 MARCH 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what recent discussion he has had with his Czech counterpart concerning the use of chemical weapons during the Gulf War; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. There have been bilateral discussions between representatives of the Ministry of Defence and representatives of the Czech Republic in late 1994. In discussions with the Chief of the Czech Chemical Troops, it was said that it was improbable that a cloud could have blow from the Iraqi facilities to reach the Czech detectors and further that the trace amounts which had been detected by the Czech equipments could not have had any effect on the health of Service personnel. There was therefore no evidence that Iraq had used chemical weapons in the Gulf conflict.

Service Personnel (Suicide)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many veterans of the Gulf war in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the RAF and *(c)* the Royal Navy have committed suicide in each of the years since the Gulf war.

Mr. Soames: Since the Gulf war, one naval Gulf war veteran has committed suicide, in 1991. There have been no suicides by Army veterans of the Gulf war. The figures for the RAF are as follows:

1991: 2
1992: 0
1993: 2
1994: 1

These numbers related only to those veterans of the Gulf war who were still serving with the armed forces at the time of their suicide.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the RAF and *(c)* the Royal Navy have committed suicide in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: The numbers of service personnel confirmed by the coroner to have committed suicide in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available are as follows:

	Royal Navy [1]	*Army*	*RAF*
1984	2	18	9
1985	5	19	7
1986	7	19	13
1987	4	15	8
1988	6	28	8
1989	4	26	6
1990	9	23	16
1991	7	26	10
1992	6	22	7
1993	1	22	10

[1] includes the Royal Marines

University Bursaries Scheme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of those who took advantage of his Department's university bursaries scheme subsequently resigned before the minimum return of service period had expired for each year since 1979.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* The numbers of students awarded Royal Navy and Royal Air Force bursaries who resigned before completing their

university course are given in the table. The number of students awarded Army bursaries who resigned before completing their university course or during their initial officer training are also given. The figures provided are those available for the years since 1979. No information is held centrally on the numbers who left the services after initial officer training, but before completing the required return of service, or of those in the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force who left during initial officer training. No records are kept for civilians as, in common with other industry schemes, students are not required to complete any return of service.

Royal Navy		*Army*		*Royal Air Force*	
Calendar year	*Number withdrawn*	*Financial year*	*Number withdrawn*	*Financial year*	*Number withdrawn*
				1983–84	2
1985	5	—	—	1984–85	1
1986	6	—	—	1985–86	7
1987	6	—	—	1986–87	3
1988	2	—	—	1987–88	6
1989	10	—	—	1988–89	4
1990	8	1989–90	23	1989–90	2
1991	8	1990–91	27	1990–91	11
1992	8	1991–92	23	1991–92	6
1993	7	1992–93	28	1992–93	3
1994	10	1993–94	24	1993–94	8
1995	[1]3	1994–95	[1]28	1994–95	[1]5

Note:
[1]To date.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the cost of his Department's university bursaries scheme for each year since 1979.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Expenditure on university bursary awards by my Department, in those years since 1979 for which figures are available, is as shown in the table:

Financial year	*Royal Navy* £	*Army* £	*Royal Air Force* £
1979–80	—	101,700	—
1980–81	—	99,900	—
1981–82	—	121,500	18,900
1982–83	—	134,100	30,600
1983–84	—	136,800	45,900
1984–85	—	163,800	48,600
1985–86	—	163,800	67,500
1986–87	—	212,400	92,700
1987–88	—	189,000	106,200
1988–89	108,000	542,400	90,900
1989–90	158,400	483,600	278,400
1990–91	156,000	555,600	141,300
1991–92	153,600	519,600	236,400
1992–93	121,200	478,800	298,800
1993–94	90,000	444,000	265,200
1994–95[1]	81,000	606,000	250,000

It is not possible separately to identify comparable figures for my Department's civilian staff. Figures are available, however, which include bursary awards, running costs for MOD student engineer training centres, salaries during pre-university year and vacation placements with MOD, travel and subsistence on MOD duty and the production of MOD training literature. The figures are as follows:

1992–93: 3,149,400
1993–94: 2,610,200
1994–95:[1] 2,256,000
Note: [1] Figures are estimates.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of bursaries awarded to university students under his Department's arrangements for officer entry by ethnic status and gender in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* Details of bursary awards by ethnic origin are not held. A breakdown of bursary awards by gender, for those years since 1979 where information is available, is as follows:

Financial year	Royal Navy		Army		Royal Air Force		Civilian	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
79–80	—	—	113	0	—	—	—	—
80–81	—	—	102	9	—	—	—	—
81–82	—	—	132	3	—	—	—	—
82–83	—	—	145	4	—	—	—	—
83–84	—	—	138	21	—	—	—	—
84–85	—	—	168	14	—	—	—	—
85–86	—	—	160	22	—	—	—	—
86–87	—	—	208	28	—	—	—	—
87–88	—	—	193	17	—	—	—	—
88–89	—	—	180	14	—	—	—	—
89–90	—	—	168	16	—	—	—	—

Financial year	Royal Navy		Army		Royal Air Force		Civilian	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
90–91	—	—	145	34	77	9	—	—
91–92	—	—	151	21	87	5	—	—
92–93	—	—	137	14	64	7	77	10
93–94	—	—	139	15	40	18	75	9
94–95	45	9	174	26	70	7	68	7

Hospital Units

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made on the choice of location for his Department's two new hospital units.

Mr. Soames: Taking account of a range of Defence-related factors, and in consultation with the Department of Health and the NHS, we have selected as the sites for the new Ministry of Defence hospital units the Frimley Park Hospital NHS trust in Surrey and the Peterborough Hospitals NHS trust in Cambridgeshire. Final contractual negotiations will now begin with the trusts concerned. We shall aim to have units fully established at these locations by April 1996.

WALES

Road Schemes

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the Welsh parliamentary constituencies in which lies each scheme in the Welsh Office's road programme.

Mr. Gwilyn Jones: Details of the forward trunk road programme were published in "The Departmental Report 1995 Welsh Office (The Governments's Expenditure Plans 1995–96 to 1997–98)". Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The information requested is as follows:

Major trunk road improvements

Scheme	*Parliamentary constituency*
In progress	
M4 Second Severn Crossing Approach Road	Newport, East
M4/A4042 Brynglas Tunnels/Malpas Relief Road	Newport, West
A5 Glyn Bends	Clwyd, South-West
A465 Aberdulais—Glynneath	Neath
A470 Pentrebach—Cefn Coed	Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
A4042 Llantarnam Bypass	Torfaen/Monmouth
Programmed[1]	
M4 Magor—Coldra Widening	Newport, East
A40 Carmarthen Eastern Bypass	Carmarthen
A40 Fishguard Western Bypass	Ceredigion and Pembroke, North
A40 Robeston Wathen Bypass	Pembroke

Major trunk road improvements

Scheme	*Parliamentary constituency*
A40 Whitland Bypass	Carmarthen
A55 Llanfair PG—West of Bryngwran	Ynys Môn
A55 West of Bryngwran—Holyhead	Ynys Môn
A55 Pont Dafydd-Waen	Clwyd, North-West
A470 Lledr Valley:	
Stage 1 (Concoed—Minffordd)	Meirionnydd Nant Conwy
Stage 2 (Dolwyddelan—Pont yr Afanc)	Meirionnydd Nant Conwy
A477 Sageston—Redberth Bypass	Pembroke
A494/A550 Deeside Park—Drome Corner	Alyn and Deeside
A550 Deeside Park Interchange	Alyn and Deeside
A550 Deeside Park—Ledsham	Alyn and Deeside
A4060 Mountain Hare—Dowlais Top	Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
in preparation[2]	
M4 Castleton—Coryton Widening	Newport, West/Cardiff, North
M4 Relief Road (Magor—Castleton	Newport, East/Newport, West
A55/A494 Ewloe Interchange	Alyn and Deeside
A55 Ewloe—Northop Widening	Alyn and Deeside
A458 Buttington Cross—Wollaston Cross	Montgomery
A465 Abergavenny—Hirwaun	Monmouth/Blaenau Gwent/Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney/Cynon Valley
A470 Llangurig—Wern Villa	Montgomery
A470 Llanrwst Bypass	Meirionnydd Nant Conwy
A470 Pontypridd—Cardiff	Pontypridd
A479 Talgarth Bypass	Brecon and Radnor
A483 Llandeilo Eastern Bypass	Carmarthen
A487 Llanwnda—South of Llanllyfni	Caernarfon
A487 Porthmadog/Minffordd/Tremadog Bypass	Caernarfon
A494 Drome Corner—Ewloe Interchange	Alyn and Deeside
Longer term consideration[3]	
A5 Bethesda Bypass	Conwy
A5 Corwen Bypass	Clwyd, South-West
A5 Halfway Bridge	Conwy
A5 Pont Padog Approaches	Meirionnydd Nant Conwy
A40 Abergavenny Western Bypass	Monmouth
A44 Aberystwyth Bypass	Ceredigion and Pembroke, North
A470 Builth Wells Bypass	Brecon and Radnor
A470 Commins Coch Bypass	Montgomery
A483 Newtown Bypass	Montgomery
A487 Caernarfon—Bontnewydd Bypass	Caernarfon

Major trunk road improvements

Scheme	*Parliamentary constituency*
A487 Furnance Bridge—Eglwys Fach	Ceredigion and Pembroke, North
A494 Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd Bypass	Clwyd, South-West
A494 Mold—Ewloe	Delyn/Alyn and Deeside
A4042 Llanellen Bypass	Monmouth
A4042 Penperlleni Bypass	Monmouth

Notes:

[1]High priority schemes on which it is planned to start work in the three years covered by the government's expenditure plans i.e. before April 1998.

[2] Schemes which are being taken forward but are unlikely to start before April 1998 because of outstanding design and statutory procedures.

[3] Schemes on which resources are not being committed to bring them to a start of works. These schemes will be reviewed annually with consideration given to adding them to the above categories or deleting them from the programme.

Peripatetic Teachers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total grant awarded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 per local education authority to support Welsh peripatetic teachers during *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95.

Mr. Richards: The relevant figures are shown the following table:

£

Local education authority	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	182,000	185,000	204,500
Dyfed	180,000	183,000	183,500
Gwent	205,000	328,000	328,500
Gwynedd	207,000	210,000	210,500
Mid Glamorgan	224,000	227,000	227,500
Powys	162,000	175,000	185,000
South Glamorgan	170,000	170,000	180,500
West Glamorgan	209,000	212,100	212,500
Totals	1,539.000	1,691.100	1,732.500

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh peripatetic teachers were supported per local education authority under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 during *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95.

Mr. Richards: The relevant figures are shown in the following table:

(a) Welsh peripatetic teachers supported under section 21 of the Education Act 1980

Local education authority	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	7	7	8
Dyfed	7	7	7
Gwynedd	8	8	8
Gwent	10	[1]25	[1]25
Mid Glamorgan	8	8	8
Powys	9	9.5	10
South Glamorgan	10	10.5	10.5
West Glamorgan	10	7	7

[1]Figures for Gwent local education authority for 1993–94 and 1994–95 include support teachers (athrawon cynnal).

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total amount of grant awarded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 to support Welsh peripatetic teachers during 1995–96.

Mr. Richards: £1,970 has been allocated to local education authorities in Wales under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 for 1995–96, £20,000 more than in 1994–95. In accordance with the authorities' priorities, 77 per cent. of this—£1,519,000—has been earmarked for peripatetic teachers.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many Welsh peripatetic teachers will be supported per local education authority by section 21 of the Education Act 1980 during 1995–96.

Mr. Richards: For 1995–96, £1,519,000 has been awarded to support teams of peripatetic teachers in local education authorities in Wales. This will support a total of approximately 70 full-time equivalent posts, but an exact figure for each local authority is not possible as grade structures vary from county to county.

Welsh Language

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the amounts awarded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 during 1992–93 *(a)* per local education authority *(b)* to the Welsh Joint Education Committee, *(c)* to other bodies *(d)* to the Welsh Language Education Development Committee for distribution to produce (i) Welsh resources, first and second language and (ii) subjects taught through the medium of Welsh and *(e)* to support the administrative costs of the Welsh Language Education Development Committee.

Mr. Richards: The relevant figures are as follows:- *(a)* shown in the following table; *(b)* £1,437,000 (including £98,950 for Welsh resources administered by the Welsh Language Education Development Committee and £284,144 for the administrative costs of the Welsh Language Development; *(c)* £1,264,000, *(d)* (i) £98,950 (ii) Nil; *(e)* £284,144.

Local education authority	*£*
Clwyd	281,000
Dyfed	257,000
Gwent	245,000
Gwynedd	231,000
Mid Glamorgan	271,000
Powys	209,000
South Glamorgan	197,500
West Glamorgan	238,500
Total	1,930,000

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the grants under section 3(3) of the Welsh Language Act 1993 which are awarded by the Welsh Language Board have drawn from section 21 of the Education Act 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Language Board's allocation for grants under section 3(3) of the Welsh Language Act 1993 for 1995–96 includes £68,000 formerly paid by the Welsh Office under section 21 of the Education Act 1980.

Education Funding

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the Welsh Office contributions under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 during *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95.

Mr. Richards: The relevant figures are as follows: *(a)* £4,631,000; *(b)* £4,675,000; *(c)* £2,475,000. For 1994–95, allocations of £1,900,000 and £180,000 were made to the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales and the Further Education Funding Authority for Wales respectively from moneys previously paid by the Welsh Office under section 21 of the Education Act 1980.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the total Welsh Office contribution under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 during 1995–96.

Mr. Richards: £1,970,000 has been allocated to local education authorities for 1995–96. In addition, £370,000 in grants formerly paid by the Department under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 has been transferred to ACAC, the Welsh Language Board, the Arts Council for Wales and the Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the amounts awarded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 for 1995–96 *(a)* per local education authority, *(b)* to the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, *(c)* to the Welsh Language Board *(d)* to the Further Education Funding Council for Wales *(e)* to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, *(f)* to the Welsh Office and *(g)* to other bodies to support the posts of Welsh peripatetic teachers.

Mr. Richards: The relevant figures are as follows: *(a)* shown on the following table; *(b)* nil, but the authority's allocation for 1995–96 includes £132,000 which was previously paid by the Welsh Office under section 21 of the Education Act 1980; *(c)* nil, but the board's allocation for 1995–96 includes £68,000 which was previously paid by the Welsh Office under section 21 of the Education Act 1980; *(d)* nil, but the council's allocation for 1995–96 includes £25,000 which was previously paid by the Welsh Office under section 21 of the Education Act 1980; *(e)* nil; *(f)* nil; *(g)* nil.

Local education authority	£
Clwyd	259,500
Dyfed	261,500
Gwent	329,500
Gwynedd	214,000
Mid Glamorgan	262,500
Powys	192,000
South Glamorgan	210,500
West Glamorgan	240,500
Total	1,970,000

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what were the amounts awarded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 during 1993–94 *(a)* per local education authority, *(b)* to the Welsh Joint Education Committee and *(c)* to the Welsh Language Education Development Committee for distribution to produce (i) Welsh resources, first and second language and (ii) subjects taught through the medium of Welsh *(d)* to support the administrative costs of the Welsh Language Education Development Committee/Pwyllgor Datblygu Addysg Gymrueg and *(e)* to other bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The relevant figures are as follows: *(a)* shown in the table; *(b)* £1,366,000 (includes £288,406 paid to the Welsh Language Development Committee); *(c)* nil. Grants for these purposes were paid direct to the various organisations concerned; *(d)* £288,406; *(e)* £1,382,000.

Section 21 grants 1993–94

Local education authority	£
Clwyd	240,000
Dyfed	235,000
Gwent	334,000
Gwynedd	233,500
Mid Glamorgan	253,000
Powys	190,500
South Glamorgan	201,000
West Glamorgan	240,000
Total	1,927,000

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what were the amounts awarded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 during 1994–95 *(a)* per local education authority *(b)* to the Welsh Joint Education Committee, *(c)* to the Further Education Funding Council, *(d)* to the Higher Education Funding Council, *(e)* to the Welsh Language Board for educational developments and *(f)* to the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales.

Mr. Richards: The relevant figures are as follows: *(a)* shown in the table; *(b)* £36,861; *(c)* nil, but the council's funding for 1994–95 included £180,000 which was previously paid by the Department under section 21 of the Education Act 1980; *(d)* nil; *(e)* nil; *(f)* nil but the authority's funding for 1994–95 included £1,900,000 which was previously paid by the Department under section 21 of the Education Act 1980.

Local education authority	£
Clwyd	262,900
Dyfed	242,500
Gwent	344,500
Gwynedd	227,000
Mid Glamorgan	257,100
Powys	204,000
South Glamorgan	204,500
West Glamorgan	247,500
Total	1,990,000

Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many *(a)* voluntary controlled schools, *(b)* voluntary aided schools and *(c)* county schools there are in each of the counties in Wales.

Mr. Richards: Data on denomination of schools, for primary and secondary sectors, are shown in the following table. Data are as at January 1994.

Primary schools	Church in Wales voluntary controlled schools	Church in Wales voluntary aided schools	Voluntary Roman Catholic schools	County schools (a)
Clwyd	24	15	10	196
Dyfed	35	8	8	262
Gwent	11	3	17	182
Gwynedd	23	3	4	161
Mid Glamorgan	1	5	11	288
Powys	22	7	2	77
South Glamorgan	5	16	17	121
West Glamorgan	0	3	9	152
Wales	121	60	78	1,439

(a) County schools include five "other" denomination schools.

Secondary schools	Church in Wales voluntary controlled schools	Church in Wales voluntary aided schools	Voluntary Roman Catholic schools	County schools
Clwyd	0	0	3	29
Dyfed	2	0	1	28
Gwent	0	0	2	31
Gwynedd	0	0	0	23
Mid Glamorgan	0	1	3	38
Powys	0	0	0	13
South Glamorgan	0	2	4	20
West Glamorgan	0	0	2	25
Wales	2	3	15	207

Source:
Schools Census (1994).

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions parliamentary questions from the hon. member for Cardiff, West in relation to non-departmental public bodies have been answered in the form of a request to the relevant chairman or chief executive of that body to write to the hon. Member *(a)* since 1 January 1995 and *(b)* between the beginning of the current parliamentary Session and December 31 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The figures are *(a)* seven and *(b)* one.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons the list of medical specialties included in the February 1995 issue of the waiting times information bulletin published by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority omitted neuro-surgery, dermatology and spinal surgery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Information published in the bulletin relates to procedures, not specialties. The procedures included are those identified by general practitioners as being most useful in helping patients to choose a consultant. No requests have been made for the inclusion of procedures in neuro-surgery, dermatology or spinal surgery. As the intention is to extend the range of procedures covered by the bulletin, any broadly based demand by general practitioners for additional information would be welcomed and acted on.

School Transport

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the legal responsibilities of local education authorities which hire vehicles for the transport of children to and from school which are not driven by licensed taxi drivers.

Mr. Richards: It is for local education authorities to make satisfactory arrangements for the health and safety of pupils including those for whom they provide transport.

Homelessness

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in rural areas in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on homeless cases accepted by local authorities in rural areas in Wales is provided in the following table:

Homeless cases accepted by local authorities in rural areas[1]

Years	Cases
1979	874
1980	883
1981	821
1982	786
1983	794
1984	833
1985	1,012
1986	1,001
1987	1,311
1988	1,295
1989	1,329
1990[2]	3,387
1991	1,625
1992	1,691

Homeless cases accepted by local authorities in rural areas[1]

Years	*Cases*
1993[3]	1,821
1994	1,770

Notes:
[1]Aberconwy, Arfon, Brecknock, Carmarthen, Ceredigion, Colwyn, Delyn, Dinefwr, Dwyfor, Meirionnydd, Monmouth, Montgomeryshire, Preseli, Pembrokeshire, Radnorshire, South Pembrokeshire and Ynys Môn district councils.
[2] Figures include estimates of 2,000 households made homeless in Colwyn as a result of the major flooding incident in February 1990.
[3] Figures include estimates of 237 households made homeless in Aberconwy as a result of the major flooding incident in Llandudno in June 1993.
Source:
Local authority returns.

Link

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in reviewing Link.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today placed in the Library of the House the report of the recently completed review of Link.

Link is an important initiative which supports research projects undertaken in partnership between industry and the science base. The review report makes a number of recommendations to improve the operation of the Link mechanism. These include proposals to streamline approval mechanisms; to increase flexibility and to facilitate and encourage the exploitation of knowledge generated in the Link projects. The Government intend to implement these recommendations, further enhancing Link's effectiveness and its contribution to wealth creation and improvements in the quality of life.

We expect Link to be an important mechanism for implementing the outcomes of the technology foresight programme, in partnership between industry, the research base and Government. In announcing the allocation of the science budget on 2 February, I earmarked £3 million in 1995–96 to fund the research council's contribution to new Link programmes. With contributions from other Government Departments and industry these new programmes will target key areas of promise and importance identified by technology foresight.

I am establishing a new Link board, replacing the existing Link steering group, to advise Government on the operation of Link. The board's principal role will be to take an independent strategic overview of the Link initiatives and its portfolio of programmes. Its membership will be:

Dr. John Parnaby CBE FEng (Chairman)
Susan Bird
Dr. Alan Calder
Dr. Ashok Ganguly
Professor Stan Mason
Professor John Mavor FEng FRSE
Herb Nahapiet
Dr. Brian Richards CBE
Phillip Ruffles FEng
Professor David Wallace FRS
Dr. Robert Whelan

The Department of Trade and Industry, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council will be represented on the board at a senior level.

ENVIRONMENT

Newtown Harbour

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Newtown river to be designated under the Ramsar convention on the conservation of wetlands of international importance.

Mr. Atkins: Newtown harbour site of special scientific interest forms part of the potential Southhampton water and Solent Ramsar site. English Nature expects to recommend listing of this site to the Department, following public consultation, within a year.

River Medina

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the classification of the wetlands bordering the River Medina.

Mr. Atkins: English Nature proposes to extend the River Medina site of special scientific interest and include it within the recommended boundary for the potential Southhampton Water and Solent special protection area and Ramsar site. My right hon. Friend will consider EN's recommendation in due course.

Westminster Redevelopment

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to investigate the events surrounding the redevelopment of the block bounded by Baker street, Blandford street, George street and Manchester street in Westminster and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State has no plans at present.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made to him over the redevelopment of the block bounded by Blandford street, Manchester street, George street and Baker street in Westminster, and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The chief executive of Westminster city council has written to the Secretary of State about this matter and I an considering the issues raised.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the listed buildings on the block bounded by Baker street, George street, Blandford street and Manchester street in Westminster, were de-listed prior to their demolition or modification.

Sir Paul Beresford: Listing and de-listing of buildings is now the responsibility of the Secretary of State for National Heritage. However, I understand that no listed buildings have, in fact, been deliberately demolished in the block concerned. Two listed buildings collapsed but have been reinstated following grant of listed building consent.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to enforce the decision made by his predecessor in 1981 that the block

bounded by Baker street, Manchester street, Blandford street and George street in Westminster should be preserved.

Sir Paul Beresford: None. In the event of a breach of planning or listed building control, responsibility for day to day enforcement rests with the local planning authority.

Water Board Chairmen

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the remuneration of the chairmen of each of the water boards in England and Wales in each of the three years prior to privatisation.

Mr. Atkins: Information about the remuneration of water authority chairmen can be found in "Public Bodies", issued by the Cabinet Office—Office of Public Service and Science. Copies of this publication for the years prior to privatisation are available in the Library.

Community Charge

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence his Department has of poll tax payments made under attachment of earnings orders not being paid over by the employer concerned to the local authority involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Community charge attachment of earnings orders are administered by billing authorities and are not monitored centrally.

An attachment of earnings order places obligations on an employer to make deductions from a debtor's pay and pass them to the issuing authority by the 18th day of the following month. Any failure by the employer to comply with the terms of an attachment of earnings order is an offence and he may be liable to a fine.

Water and Sewerage Companies

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what has been the differential between dividends paid by appointed businesses in the water and sewerage industry and the dividends paid by the group companies for each year since privatisation;

(2) if he will list *(a)* the dividends paid by the appointed businesses and *(b)* the dividends paid by the group companies for each of the water and sewerage companies in England and Wales for each year since privatisation.

Mr. Atkins: Information on company dividends is published in the annual reports and accounts of the appointed businesses and the group companies.

Government Car Service (Natural Gas)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the performance of the ministerial car which was converted to run on natural gas; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government car service is still carrying out trials on the car, which has been used extensively by Ministers and officials from this Department and others. It is expected that trials will continue for a further three months. Final assessment of the car's performance and that of a second car which GCS will be taking delivery of in the near future, will take into account the emissions performance, fuel economy, cost-effectiveness and the response of both drivers and passengers.

Listed Buildings

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment under what law a local planning authority is empowered to insist that an inquirer should require listed building consent to install a burglar alarm in a listed building with the provision of an outside bell box on the face of that listed building.

Sir Paul Beresford: Section 7 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides that consent is normally required for any works of alteration of a listed building which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest.

Reclaimed Colliery Sites

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the colliery sites which have been reclaimed since 1990 under the provisions of the Moynihan agreement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand from British Coal that the colliery sites reclaimed, or in the process of reclamation, since 1990 are Barnsley Main, Creswell, Dearne Valley, Denby Grange and Treeton. There are a further 13 sites where British Coal has concluded, or is in the process of concluding negotiations on appropriate reclamation schemes.

Power Station Emissions

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were annual actual emissions of *(a)* nitrogen dioxide, *(b)* sulphur dioxide, *(c)* all oxides of nitrogen and *(d)* particulates from each of the fossil-fuelled power stations operating in (i) 1980, ii) 1984, iii) 1985 and (iv) each year since 1990.

Mr. Atkins: I enclose details of the emissions from power stations that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution holds centrally and which have been placed on the large combustion plant directive inventory. These are the SO_2, NO_x and particulate emissions from National Power and PowerGen for 1991 to 1993—emission data on particulates are held only for 1993. The 1994 emissions are not yet available.

Data for total emissions from power stations have been compiled within the national atmospheric emissions inventory by the National Environmental Technology Centre, formerly Warren Spring Laboratory. Available information. for 1980, 1984 and 1985 is given.

The other information requested was not collected for previous years.

Emissions from power stations in England and Wales 1991 to 1993

	1991 SO_2 Tonnes	*[1] NO_x Tonnes*	*1992 SO_2 Tonnes*	*[1] NO_x Tonnes*	*1993 SO_2 Tonnes*	*[1] NO_x Tonnes*	*Particulates Tonnes*
National Power							
Aberthaw A and B	84,167	35,527	76,350	30,893	75,668	26,512	1,500
Agecroft	9,589	3,044	7,572	2,224	869	280	30
Blyth A and B	84,855	24,243	72,059	22,138	42,860	12,700	1,570
Didcot	126,150	34,378	102,456	28,787	99,530	28,303	8,420
Drax	236,457	81,337	264,967	81,370	228,265	70,200	38,680
Eggborough	143,470	31,990	146,328	27,498	118,154	23,546	12,710
Fawley	14,495	3,670	1,458	286	7,314	1,630	0
Ironbridge	77,144	21,170	74,131	22,986	62,226	19,990	6,400
Littlebrook	34,406	7,405	22,112	4,406	25,458	4,971	0
Padiham	11,287	2,191	10,910	2,061	7,790	1,728	180
Pembroke	10,403	2,926	14,562	3,937	10,058	2,948	0
Rugeley A and B	116,588	33,799	97,864	26,571	101,324	24,959	0
Skelton Grange	29,159	7,113	17,965	4,479	8,400	1,980	240
Staythorpe	20,325	6,618	31,075	6,971	23,966	5,515	2,310
Thorpe Marsh	71,765	19,117	62,525	15,860	64,003	16,635	7,470
Tilbury	32,236	15,695	39,558	18,658	40,365	18,385	2,350
Uskmouth	14,601	5,115	9,078	3,092	2,767	1,050	170
West Burton	165,500	35,221	170,325	33,674	165,734	29,916	17,490
West Thurrock	30,583	15,102	30,006	12,938	8,067	2,980	470
Willington A and B	51,041	11,845	40,701	9,577	23,565	5,714	500
Sub Total	1,364,221	397,505	1,292,002	358,406	1,116,383	299,940	100,490
PowerGen							
Carrington	625	176	0	0	0	0	0
Castle Donnington	12,865	3,407	5,340	1,426	565	128	800
Cottam	173,254	45,559	196,610	45,084	176,121	40,859	5,800
Drakelow B	12,182	3,140	4,002	957	293	79	400
Drakelow C	57,583	16,218	54,722	14,475	43,738	11,849	2,100
Elland	1,092	262	0	0	0	0	0
Ferrybridge B	6,970	1,876	3,515	940	0	0	0
Ferrybridge C	178,376	47,794	172,927	50,004	158,828	44,895	5,900
Fiddlers Ferry	171,018	22,689	159,972	19,873	114,674	13,853	3,200
Grain	29,115	6,659	19,340	3,935	7,198	1,485	6,000
Hams Hall	5,873	1,941	1,050	331	0	0	0
High Marnham	54,509	14,893	42,523	12,029	26,859	6,817	4,000
Ince	8,207	1,459	50,726	7,421	58,022	8,222	500
Kingsnorth	86,606	30,318	67,805	21,097	50,594	13,541	3,000
Ratcliffe	170,180	45,184	179,996	43,759	185,298	43,464	6,400
Richborough	15,186	2,206	17,745	2,622	19,590	2,334	200
Sub Total	983,641	243,780	976,273	223,953	841,780	187,526	38,300
Total	2,347,862	641,285	2,268,275	582,359	1,958,163	487,466	138,790

[1] NOx figures do not include all oxides of nitrogen

Estimated emissions from Power Stations

	1980	*1984*	*1985*
So_2 (thousand tonnes)	3,007	2,589	2,627
No_x[1] (thousand tonnes)	880	711	775
Black smoke (thousand tonnes)	29	33	28

[1] Expressed as nitrogen dioxide equivalent.

Hastings Shingle Bank

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department will issue the Government view requested by the Crown Estate on the application by a consortium of companies for a licence to dredge a further 30 million tonnes of material over a 10-year period from the currently licensed Hastings shingle bank.

Sir Paul Beresford: After careful consideration, a letter is today being sent to the Crown Estate indicating that my Department is minded to issue a favourable Government view on this application, subject to the imposition of stringent conditions. These include limiting the maximum amount of material to be dredged to 15 million tonnes and limiting the term of the licence to five years.

The dredging of marine aggregates makes an important contribution to the supply of minerals for a wide range of purposes for the construction industry and beach nourishment. The material on the Hastings shingle bank is of a particularly high quality.

In indicating that the Government are minded to issue a favourable Government view in respect of this application, the Government wish to stress that, in addition to reducing the amount of material to be extracted and limiting the term of the licence to five years, they have also decided to impose tough conditions on working arrangements and monitoring. These will ensure that essential fishing and amenity interests are protected.

A Government view letter will be issued once the conditions have been finalised.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amount of interest receipts earned by each county council for the year 1993–94, separating out the capital financing element; if he will list the counties' budgeted estimates for interest receipts for 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is given. Estimates for 1995–96 are not yet available.

EXTERNAL INTEREST RECEIPTS: ENGLISH COUNTY COUNCILS

Capital Financing Interest Receipts

This consists of external interest on provision for credit liabilities including reserved capital receipts.

The estimates of interest on provision for credit liabilities reflect the extent to which authorities have used reserved receipts to repay debt early, and are not therefore comparable with the interest receipt element in the standard spending assessment capital financing block, which assumes that no part of reserved receipts is used to repay debt early.

Other Interest Receipts

This consists of external interest receipts and dividends including those derived from Housing Act advances.

£ thousands

	1993–94 Outturn Capital Financing	*1993–94 Outturn Other*	*1994–95 Budget Capital Financing*	*1994–95 Budget Other*
Avon	1,079	4,248	430	4,349
Bedfordshire	830	592	1,150	20
Berkshire	133	4,973	51	3,675
Buckinghamshire	0	2,961	1,947	954
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	191
Cheshire	0	10,116	400	0
Cleveland	0	3,027	19	1,781
Cornwall	0	2,369	0	2,200
Cumbria	0	2,491	0	1,500
Derbyshire	0	4,545	0	3,600
Devon	0	5,693	233	4,346
Dorset	0	2,316	300	1,500
Durham	0	4,712	0	2,300
East Sussex	0	2,575	0	1,219
Essex	0	4,890	444	3,293
Gloucestershire	0	2,953	0	1,590
Hampshire	0	7,400	0	2,661
Hereford and Worcester	0	2,278	0	425
Hertfordshire	0	11,104	0	3,320
Humberside	0	4,581	0	3,000
Isle of Wight	0	173	0	0
Kent	6,802	33	0	5,172
Lancashire	19	6,171	0	3,739
Leicestershire	0	4,345	0	2,924
Lincolnshire	0	2,009	0	2,682
Norfolk	0	5,289	0	4,104
Northamptonshire	0	1,541	488	431
Northumberland	0	2,021	0	919
North Yorkshire	0	4,932	317	3,576
Nottinghamshire	0	0	450	7,450
Oxfordshire	147	4,947	0	3,500
Shropshire	0	2,528	0	1,827
Somerset	171	2261	214	1,831
Staffordshire	0	4,047	3,612	0
Suffolk	0	5,635	0	120
Surrey	589	2,217	39	121
Warwickshire	1,121	2,404	1,815	1,036
West Sussex	0	2,731	0	1,401
Wiltshire	0	3,099	0	1,218

Sources:
1993–93 RS form, 1994–95 RA95 form.

Community Forests

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the land use planning implications of the community forest programme.

Sir Paul Beresford: The designation of a community forest had no direct statutory implications for the planning process. It does not confer a more restrictive, or more permissive, of land use planning designation of the area. The planting of trees and the provision of public access are voluntary. The statutory role and responsibilities of the local planning authorities are unaffected. Local community forest teams do not have any status within the statutory land use planning system.

Planning applications are determined in accordance with the statutory development plan, and any other material considerations. Each community forest has a non-statutory forest plan which describes how the forest team working with a variety of partners propose to create the forest. Since new woodlands on a significant scale may have implications for other land uses, local planning authorities should take approved community forest plans into account in formulating their policies and proposals for development and use of land in development plans.

Although an approved community forest plan might be a material consideration in deciding a planning application within a forest, policies and proposals that are likely to provide the basis for deciding such applications or determining conditions to be attached to relevant planning permissions should be set out in the development plan, which is subject to statutory procedures.

Community forests should be shown on structure plan key diagrams and on local plan proposals maps. Development plans should facilitate the establishment of agreed community forests and provide that any development proposals within them should respect the woodland setting. Local planning authorities should be flexible in their approach to negotiating planting and landscaping requirements with developers. Any planting or landscaping required, whether on-site or off-site, should be directly related to the particular development proposal and should be no more than is necessary to overcome planning objections to it. Conversely planning permission should not be granted simply because applicants are prepared to plant trees.

Any development proposal within community forests in the green belt should be subject to the normal policies controlling development in green belts. Community forests provide an effective mechanism for achieving the positive objectives for the use of green-belt land set out in planning policy guidance 2, revised in January 1995.

Peat

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment if he will make public the results of consultation responses to the draft mineral planning guidance note guidelines for peat provision in England, including the place of alternative materials, issued by his Department in September 1994.

Sir Paul Beresford: Yes. I have today placed copies of a list of all those who responded to the consultation together with a summary of their views in the Library of the House. A copy of any individual response can be inspected in the library of my Department.

Local Authorities (Retendering Directions)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet considered the responses by Walsall metropolitan borough council and Canterbury city council to the notices served on the authorities on 21 November 1994 and 11 January 1995 under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B Jones: My right hon. Friend has considered carefully the responses which Walsall metropolitan borough council and Canterbury city council have made to the notices served on the authorities on 21 November 1994 and 11 January 1995, and has today given the authorities directions under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988.

The direction given to Walsall metropolitan borough council requires the authority to retender the contract for the repair and maintenance of vehicles and plant, which was the subject of the notice, so that new arrangements are in place by 1 April 1996, and to seek my right hon. Friend's consent should it wish to reassign the work in-house.

The direction given to Canterbury city council requires the authority to retender the contract for street cleansing and related services, which was the subject of the notice, so that new arrangements are in place by 1 January 1996, and to seek my right hon. Friend's consent should they wish to reassign the work to the direct service organisation.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, when the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee—Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations joint study group examining site selection for radioactive waste repositories will be published.

Mr. Atkins: Sir John Knill, the chairman of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee, was invited last year to chair a joint study group drawn from members of RWMAC and the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations to consider the approach to site selection for radioactive waste disposal facilities and the criteria for ensuring the protection of human health.

The study group's report has been published today, together with the minority views of two members. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. I welcome the report and minority views as a valuable contribution to the debate on this issue. They represent advice to the Government and are not a statement of policy. The Government's response will be published in due course, together with the final conclusions of the review of radioactive waste management policy.

Education Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates of the costs of *(a)* teaching staff, *(b)* books and equipment and *(c)* repairs and maintenance he made when calculating the control total for the education service block of the total standard spending for 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* In reaching his decision on the control total for local authority spending on education for 1995–96, my right hon. Friend took account of probable pay and non-pay inflation, rising school rolls, and other relevant spending pressures. The education standard spending assessments calculated for individual local authorities are not spending targets and the level of spending on teaching staff, books, equipment, repairs and maintenance is a matter for local authorities and schools themselves.

Tourism

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities in England which employ a director of tourism services or similar.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

The "Municipal Year Book 1995" lists 177 local authorities in England which employ a "tourism officer". Not all those listed, however, are senior officers or heads of department, or responsible solely for tourism; to distinguish and list those which are would involve disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Prescription Charges

14. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the rate of increase in prescription charges since 1978.

Mr. Malone: Increases in national health service prescription charges have never been linked to the rate of inflation; nor is the level of the charge itself related to the cost of an individual prescription item or to the cost to the NHS of dispensing it. The charge is a reasonable sum paid by those who can afford to do so. Our extensive arrangements for exemption and for charge remission under the NHS low-income scheme are among the most generous in Europe. They ensure that only those able to afford to pay are asked to do so.

Waiting Lists

15. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what, at the latest date, are the total figures for all waiting lists in all NHS hospitals and trusts.

Mr. Malone: Provisional figures show that, at the end of December 1994, the latest date for which information is available, 1,071,638 people in England were waiting for in-patient or day case treatment.

Generic Drugs

16. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efforts are being made by her Department to increase the proportion of generic drugs prescribed by general practitioners in place of their branded equivalents.

Mr. Malone: The Department's policies to promote cost-effective prescribing by general practitioners have brought about significant and continuing increases in the use of generic medicines.

"The Health of the Nation"

17. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of Sate for Health what conclusions she has reached about the "The Health of the Nation" from the 1991 census.

Mr. Sackville: The 1991 census predates the publication in July 1992 of the Government's health strategy "The Health of the Nation". However, census data help in establishing a good baseline for accurate population estimates. These are used in calculating incidence and mortality rates, enabling "The Health of the Nation" targets to be accurately measured.

Asthma, Newbury

18. **Mr. Rendel:** To aks the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the incidence of asthma in the Newbury area since 1988.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Richard Eassie, chairman of Berkshire health authority, for details.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average morbidity in terms of annual admissions to hospital per 100,000 population in each regional health authority and district health authority for asthma in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1984, *(c)* 1985 and *(d)* in each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93 are shown in the table. Comparable figures for the earlier years and by district are not available.

Finished consultant episodes, England
Patients with asthma, per 100,000 population

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Northern	185	212	193
Yorkshire	217	161	187
Trent	180	185	178
East Anglian	142	152	133
North west Thames	213	241	253
North east Thames	223	207	209
South east Thames	193	224	195
South west Thames	189	189	172
Wessex	140	157	144
Oxford	144	170	160
South western	167	180	164
West Midlands	192	213	219
Mersey	210	246	245
North western	263	282	261

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics.

NHS, Cheshire

19. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future structure of the NHS in Cheshire.

Mr. Malone: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Secretary of State recently agreed to establish a new South Cheshire district health authority from 1 April 1995 to replace the Chester and South and East Cheshire DHAs. By changing the boundaries of adjacent DHAs most of Cheshire now falls within the new South Cheshire DHA and North Cheshire DHA. Any further changes to the boundaries of health authorities in Cheshire will be the subject of public consultation if and when the Health Authorities Bill has received Royal Assent.

Consultants

20. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the proportion of time spent by NHS consultant doctors in the private sector.

Mr. Malone: It is a statutory requirement and an underpinning principle of the conduct of private practice in national health service hospitals, agreed with the medical profession, that private practice work should not significantly interfere with a hospital's NHS contracts. Within this framework, consultants are free to undertake private work in addition to their NHS duties and in their own time, sometimes using resources bought from the health service. The combination of private practice and NHS treatment means that, overall, more patients are treated than if health care was only available through the NHS.

28. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to reduce the cost to NHS trusts of dispensing with the services of consultants who do not meet the required professional standards.

Mr. Malone: It is for individual national health service employers to taken decisions about their staff. They should exercise this responsibility with full regard to probity and accountability. They need to ensure that every

effort is made to keep the infrequent costs of dismissal of consultants under control.

Waiting Times

21. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the average waiting time for NHS patients since 1989.

Mr. Malone: The average waiting time of people on a waiting list for hospital admission has fallen from 9.3 months in March 1989 to 4.6 months in September 1994.

GP Fundholders

22. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP fundholders practices will pilot total purchasing for fundholders in Anglia and Oxford region, and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: I welcome the fact that 12 practices in four separate pilot projects, covering a total population of 159,000 will pilot total purchasing in anglia and Oxford region and will take part in the national evaluation programme. Fundholders and health authorities are working in partnership and have made clear their commitment to this important project in which general practitioners will take responsibility for purchasing all hospital and community health care for their patients.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend GP fundholding; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) earlier today.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *401*, if she will now publish information for 1993–94 on general practitioner fundholders' savings, by region.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* The information requested is shown in the table. Nationally, retained savings equalled £64.2 million in 1993–94, about 3.5 per cent. of budgets set—similar to the levels of efficiency savings made by fundholders in the first two years of the scheme.

Savings are held by family health services authorities on behalf of the patients of fundholders. They may be retained for up to four years, to be used for the benefit of patients of the practice as outlined in the practice's annual business plan.

Region	*1993–94 Retained savings (£ million)*	*Percentage of budgets set*
Northern	5.0	4.0
Yorkshire	7.6	3.8
Trent	5.1	2.4
East Anglia	2.5	2.9
North West Thames	6.6	4.6
North East Thames	2.8	4.2
South East Thames	3.7	2.9
South West Thames	3.8	3.6
Wessex	2.6	2.6
Oxford	4.2	3.6
South Western	3.1	2.7
West Midlands	9.9	4.7
Mersey	4.6	3.4
North Western	3.0	3.0
England	64.2	3.5

Note:

Retained savings may not sum to England total due to rounding.

Source:

Regional Health Authorities.

Community Care

23. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she next expects to meet Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation to discuss the implications for disabled persons of the Government's community care policy.

Mr. Bowis: I meet disability organisations on a regular basis and discuss a range of issues including community care. RADAR has not requested a meeting recently, so I do not have any specific plans for a meeting with it.

27. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the criteria for the distribution and expenditure of the special transitional grant for community care; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: These are kept under review.

Health Care, West London

24. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will next meet the chairman of the Hammersmith Hospitals NHS trust to discuss health care in west London.

Mr. Malone: I plan to meet Sir Christopher Bland on 6 April 1995.

Boxers

25. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being carried out on brain damage to boxers.

Mr. Malone: The Department of Health and the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, are not currently undertaking any research specifically into brain damage to boxers. However, the MRC, the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research, spent £761,000 on research into head injury in 1993–94, a proportion of which may be relevant to brain damage in boxers. In addition, the council supports research in a number of areas that are relevant to brain damage in boxers including dementia, pain, vision, cognitive changes and brain repair.

The Department of Health has commissioned a study entitled "Rehabilitation of Brain Injured Adults", which is estimated to cost some £1.2 million.

Domiciliary Care

26. **Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards exist to ensure proper standards of domiciliary care.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. member to the reply I gave the right hon. member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 14 February, column *644*.

Nurses and Midwives

29. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes there have been in the numbers of qualified nurses and midwives over the last decade; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Qualified nursing and midwifery staff in the NHS and private sector hospitals, homes and clinics England as at 30 September each year (practice nurses are as at 1 October each year)

whole time equivalents

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Total qualified nursing and midwifery staff working in HCHS, GMS and private sector	238,720	245,100	254,690	260,950	—	271,100	277,920	282,500	289,340	297,050	297,990
NHS:											
HCHS qualified nursing staff	223,310	227,740	234,130	236,770	239,360	241,780	244,220	242,340	243,250	246,570	241,850
GMS practice nurses	1,660	1,920	2,210	2,500	2,770	3,480	4,630	7,740	8,780	9,120	9,600
Private hospitals, homes, clinics: qualified staff	13,750	15,450	18,350	21,680	—	25,840	29,070	32,430	37,310	41,360	46,530

Source:
Nursing & Midwifery: PD(STATS)B non-medical work force census.
GMS Practice Nurses: general medical practitioners census.
Private Sector Nursing: annual KO36 returns.

Notes:
1. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.
2. Total may not equal sum of their component parts due to rounding.
3. All nursing and midwifery figures exclude agency staff.
4. (—) denotes the figure is unavailable.

Immunisation and Cancer Screening

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the effect of the GP contract on immunisation and cancer screening services.

Mr. Malone: When the new general practitioner contract was introduced in 1990, 89 per cent. of GPs met targets for childhood immunisation and 86 per cent. for cancer screening. By April 1993, this had increased to 96 per cent. of GPs meeting childhood immunisation targets and 98 per cent. cancer screening targets. This shows clearly the positive impact of the GP contract on these services.

Sir Duncan Nicol

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *586*, if she will provide details of the actual *(a)* pension payment and *(b)* redundancy payment made to Sir Duncan Nicol.

Mr. Sackville: It is not common practice to make public personal information of this kind. I shall write to the hon. Member with background information.

Epilepsy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many brain operations were carried out for intractable non-lesional epilepsy in the last year for which figures are available in the age groups *(a)* zero to 18 years, *(b)* 18 to 45 years and *(c)* 45 years and above.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Hampshire Social Services

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure of Hampshire country council on social services each year since 1979 expressed in cash terms, real terms and as a real terms percentage increase or decrease on 1979 and the previous year.

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table.

Net personal social services expenditure by Hampshire County Council

Year	*Net expenditure Cash £ million*	*Net expenditure Real terms at 1992–93 £ million*	*Change over previous year Real terms Percentage*	*Increase over 1978–79 Real terms Percentage*
1978–79	23.6	65.6	—	—
1979–80	28.2	67.3	2.6	2.6
1980–81	33.5	67.5	0.4	3.0

Net personal social services expenditure by Hampshire County Council

Year	Net expenditure Cash £ million	Net expenditure Real terms at 1992–93 £ million	Change over previous year Real terms Percentage	Increase over 1978–79 Real terms Percentage
1981–82	37.7	69.3	2.6	5.7
1982–83	40.9	70.1	1.2	6.9
1983–84	43.2	70.7	0.8	7.8
1984–85	45.6	71.1	0.6	8.5
1985–86	47.6	70.4	−1.0	7.5
1986–87	51.3	73.6	4.5	12.3
1987–88	57.9	78.8	7.1	20.3
1988–89	64.2	82.0	4.0	25.1
1989–90	69.2	82.6	0.8	26.1
1990–91	79.9	88.3	6.9	34.8
1991–92	91.7	95.4	8.0	45.5
1992–93	100.8	100.8	5.7	53.8

Breast Cancer

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many specialist breast cancer units there are; what are their locations; and what plans there are to increase their number.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available centrally on the number or location of specialist breast cancer units. It is for health authorities to determine whether additional breast cancer services are required.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has taken place into what is the best time in a women's menstrual cycle to have surgery.

Mr. Sackville: We are aware of a number of published studies into the best time in a woman's menstrual cycle to have surgery for breast cancer. There is no conclusive evidence about the most appropriate time for breast cancer surgery; most suggest that prognosis is worse for those who have surgery in the early part of the menstrual cycle. One recent study suggested that it is the perimenstrual period that is the most disadvantageous, another shows no variation in outcome related to menstrual phase.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is available to suggest whether women who breast feed are less likely to contract breast cancer.

Mr. Sackville: There is some evidence to suggest that mothers who breast feed may be less likely to develop breast cancer. The most recent large international study was a World Health Organisation collaborative study published in 1993 in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*. This concluded that long-term lactation may reduce the risk of breast cancer.

Local Base Statistics

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will state when the Office of Population Censuses and Statistics will make available to local authorities the local base statistics for subdivisions of wards originally promised for mid-1994; and what are the reasons for the delays in processing this information.

Mr. Sackville: 1991 census local base statistics for sub-divisions of wards has already been produced. With this particular product customers were able to specify their own breakdown of wards in terms of enumeration districts. There was, however, a delay in their production, caused by an extension to the deadline for orders from customers, due to limited initial interest, so that the maximum number could be processed simultaneously in an effort to keep costs down.

Breastfeeding

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on supporting the promotion of breastfeeding; what measures are being taken to support breastfeeding; and what future plans she has to promote breastfeeding.

Mr. Sackville: Based on medical advice, the Government have consistently supported breastfeeding as the best means of feeding a baby. We set up, under "The Health of the Nation" initiative, the national breastfeeding working group to coordinate action to promote and facilitate breastfeeding. We will be issuing fresh guidance on breastfeeding to the national health service shortly, drawing on the work of the national breastfeeding working group. We provide nationally produced publicity material for National Breastfeeding Awareness Week, which this year will run from the 22 to 26 May. We are contributing towards the cost of the Health Visitors Association and Royal College of Midwives joint training programme "Invest in Breast Together" which will be launched during National Breastfeeding Awareness Week. We also provide funding, through section 64 grant aid, to the three voluntary organisations supporting breastfeeding.

We have taken steps to restrict the advertising and promotion of baby milks in the infant formula and follow-on formula regulations which came into force on 1 March 1995. These give a statutory basis to the restrictions on advertising in place since 1983 under the voluntary agreement with the baby milk manufacturers.

The quinquennial infant feeding surveys also provide information on breastfeeding and the factors likely to influence a woman's choice on how she feeds her baby. Field work for the 1995 survey will start later this year.

Baby Milk Advertising

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the impact of the commercial advertising of baby milk formula on the health of infants, with particular reference to those in low-income families.

Mr. Sackville: None. The advertising and promotion of baby milks is restricted by the infant formula and follow-on formula regulations which came into force on 1 March 1995.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with whom she consulted before deciding not to impose a statutory ban on the commercial advertising of baby milk formula.

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

I attach a list of those to whom the draft infant formula and follow-on formula regulations were sent by this Department. The Scottish Office and Welsh Office also sent the proposals to organisations in Scotland and Wales respectively.

Consultation List for Draft Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations

Abbot Laboratories Ltd.
Action and Information on Sugar
Advertising Association
Advertising Standards Authority
Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances
Andrew Smith MP
ASDA Stores Ltd.
Association of Breastfeeding Mothers
Association of District Councils
Association of Public Analysts
Baby Milk Action Group
Boots Company plc
British Dental Association
British Dietetic Association
British Medical Association
British Nutrition Foundation
British Paediatric Association
British Retail Consortium
Children's Society
Christian Aid
Code Monitoring Committee
Colin Shepherd MP
COMA Panel on Nutrition
Consumers Association
Consumers in the EC Group (UK)
Cow and Gate Nutritcia
Crookes Healthcare
CWS Ltd.
Dairy Trade Federation
Department for Child Health
Dietetic Department
Dunn Nutrition Laboratory
Farley
Food and Drink Federation
Food Commission
Health Visitors Association
H J Heinz Co Ltd.
Infant and Dietetic Foods Association
Institute of Environmental Health officers
J Sainsbury plc
John Biffen MP
The Rt Hon John Patten NW
John Wyeth and Brother Ltd.
LA Leche League
Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards
Leatherhead Food Research Association
Marks and Spencer plc
Maternity Alliance
Mead Johnson
Medical Research Council
Michael Trend NW
Milupa Ltd.
National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts
National Childbirth Trust
National Consumer Council
National Dairy Council
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Food Alliance
Neo Natal Nurses Association
Nestle UK Ltd.
NHS Supplies Authority
Oxfam
Oxford Diocesan Synod
Ray Whitney OBE MP
Robert Jackson MP
Royal College of Nursing
Royal College of Midwives
Royal College of Midwives (Scotland)
Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
SHS Hospital Supplies
SMA Nutrition
St. Bartholomew's Hospital
UK Committee for UNICEF
Unilever Research
Waitrose Ltd.
Zeneca Bio Products

NHS Prescriptions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the current medications and appliances that are obtainable on an NHS prescription that are *(a)* cheaper to obtain by paying for them over the counter at a pharmacist than the current prescription fee and *(b)* that, although cheaper, can be obtained only on an NHS prescription.

Mr. Malone: The information is not available.

Patient Transfer to Leeds

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the circumstances relating to the transfer to Leeds by helicopter of a patient from south-east London.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to receive an initial report on this matter from South Thames regional office in the near future. A report will be published as soon as possible thereafter and any issues arising will be further investigated.

Historic Hospital Buildings

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many historic hospital buildings built before 1900 have been demolished by hospital governing bodies since the creation of the NHS trusts.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Each individual national health service trust is responsible for management of the estate in which they operate, including compliance with town planning and legislative requirements concerning the demolition of buildings.

Ebola and Marburg Viruses

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has had from the Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology, in Oxford concerning the potential plague-like spread of Ebola and Marburg viruses; what contingency plans she has to deal

with any outbreak of Ebola and Marburg disease; and whether she will consider contracts with Porton Down to research into vaccines and therapies to alleviate Ebola and Marburg disease.

Mr. Sackville: We have had no representations from the Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology in Oxford about Ebola or Marburg viruses.

We are not aware of any evidence of respiratory spread of either Ebola or Marburg viruses between monkeys and humans or between humans. The current consensus of opinion is that these viruses are blood borne.

We do continue to take a cautious approach and recommend strict precautions for personnel dealing with definite or suspected cases of viral haemorrhagic fever to prevent any possibility of spread. The Department of Health funds high-security infectious disease units for the treatment of patients with viral haemorrhagic fever although no case has been seen in the United Kingdom for about 10 years. These viruses appear to have a limited capacity for spread within the human population and the need for a vaccine for use in the UK has not been established.

National Blood Authority

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost, including paper, printing, packaging and posting, arising from the letter from the chairman of the National Blood Authority to blood donors regarding the proposed reorganisation of the National Blood Service.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 9 December 1994, column *400*.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *41–42* (1) if she will publish what information she has about the cost of medical negligence claims by *(a)* specialities and *(b)* staff grade;

(2) if she will publish a list of clinical negligence claims by trust.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Adoption

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given by her Department to the Institute of Economic Affairs proposals regarding the adoption of children of single parents; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Health Care (Older People)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the standard of health care enjoyed by people aged over 60 years now, 10 years ago and 20 years ago.

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The information is not available in precisely the form requested. Mortality rates in people over 60 years have fallen during the periods in question reflecting, among other factors, improvements in health care and advances in treatment. Life expectancy at age 60 has risen from 15.4 years in 1970 to 1972 to 17.8 years in 1990 to 1992 for men and from 20 to 22.1 years for women.

Staffing and activity levels in the national health service have improved substantially across major relevant indices. For example, the numbers of hip replacement operations have increased by 47 per cent. since 1978, the number of eye lens operations by 119 per cent. and the number of coronary artery bypass grafts by 276 per cent. The number of elderly patient treatments has increased by 137 per cent. for in-patients, to 558,000 finished consultant episodes, and by 91 per cent. for out-patients, to 459,000 episodes. The numbers of consultant geriatricians have increased by 66 per cent. About 42 per cent. of total NHS expenditure is attributable to services to older people, who make up about 16 per cent. of the population. These improvements reflect major advances in medical science, in surgical, clinical and nursing practice and in other health care skills. They demonstrate the Government's continued commitment to the NHS, including the care of older people.

We have also made considerable progress in the implementation of our community care changes and in improvements to primary care services, many of which are of particular benefit to older people. Services are becoming more responsive to the needs and wishes of patients through quality initiatives such as the patients charter.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 15 March 1995

TRANSPORT

School Transport

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that vehicles hired for the transport of children to and from school have the appropriate licence or that local education authorities be empowered to issue a new form of licence specifically for school transport purposes.

Mr. Norris: All motor vehicles, including those used for school transport, are subject to the requirements of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 and to annual roadworthiness testing. Public service vehicles must also satisfy additional construction requirements and be licensed through the operator licensing system under which their operators are subject to sanction by traffic commissioners if standards are not maintained.

We do not consider further controls to be necessary.

Vehicle Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those sites where he is currently monitoring vehicle pollution stating in each case *(a)* what monitoring he is undertaking and *(b)* whether PM_{10} is counted.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked its chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 14 March 1995:

The Minister for Local Transport and Road Safety, Steven Norris, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those sites where he is currently monitoring vehicle pollution stating in each case (a) what monitoring he is undertaking and (b) whether PM_{10} is counted.

We do not routinely monitor vehicle pollution but the Highways Agency has a number of monitoring stations in operation either for research purposes to aid the development of air quality techniques or to inform environmental assessment of specific highway proposals where appropriate. For most situations involving road schemes we use mathematical modelling to assess pollution levels. Where the modelling techniques cannot adequately reflect the characteristics of a particular location monitoring work is undertaken.

The table below contains our current active sites.

Road name	*Location*	*Emissions monitored*
M4	Theale	Carbon Monoxide Nitric Oxide Nitrogen Dioxide Total Oxides of Nitrogen Ozone Total Hydrocarbons Non-Methane Hydrocarbons Methane Range of Poly-aromatic Hydrocarbons
Victoria Street	London	Carbon Monoxide Nitric Oxide Nitrogen Dioxide Total Oxides of Nitrogen Ozone Total Hydrocarbons Non-Methane Hydrocarbons Methane Range of Poly-Aromatic Hydrocarbons Benzene Toluene Xylene Range of Carbonyl Compounds
M4 London	Between Junctions 3 and 4B	Carbon Monoxide Nitric Oxide Nitrogen Dioxide Total Oxides of Nitrogen PM_{10} Benzene Tolluene Xylene
M4 London	Junction 4	Carbon Monoxide Nitric Oxide Nitrogen Dioxide Total Oxides of Nitrogen
M62 Manchester	East Junction 17	Carbon Monoxide Nitric Oxide Nitrogen Dioxide Total Oxides of Nitrogen
M2 Kent	Junction 3 Area	Carbon Monoxide Nitric Oxide Nitrogen Dioxide Total Oxides of Nitrogen Benzene Tolluene

At present PM_{10} is measured at one location on the M4 but our intention is to commence monitoring of this emission at new sites on the M62 (Manchester) and the M25 (Surrey) shortly.

Felixstone Port

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will investigate claims that legitimate operators using EU crews and acceptable working practices have been blocked from using the port of Folkestone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: There is a disagreement between the harbour authority and a ship operator. I hope the parties will resolve the disagreement. I appear to have no locus to intervene.

Seat Belts (Minibuses and Coaches)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to introduce compulsory fitment of seatbelts to minibuses and coaches used for the transport of children as foreshadowed in his announcement of 19 July 1994.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am today issuing for consultation draft regulations on the subject.

Lorries (Accidents)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the fatal accidents involving large lorries in 1993 were caused as a result of restricted vision on the near side.

Mr. Norris: This information is not available.

Disabled Drivers (Parking)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he holds on the provision by other European Union countries of disabled drivers' parking permits similar to the orange badge; and if he will list all those that are recognised for parking purposes in this country in line with the decisions of 6 December 1977 European Conference of Ministers of Transport.

Mr. Norris: Formal reciprocal parking arrangements exist with the following European Union countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden, and also with Switzerland. All these countries operate national schemes similar to the orange badge scheme. There are no formal reciprocal arrangements with Greece, the Republic of Ireland or in Spain, though concessions may be available in the Republic of Ireland and in Spain. Details of known parking concessions throughout Europe are set out in the Department's leaflet "Reciprocal parking arrangements for disabled and blind people in Europe". I am sending a copy to the hon. Member.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Mr. Norris: The Department's personnel information system records the following number of temporary employees this year and in the last five years:

	Department of Transport		*Of which: Agencies*	
	Numbers	*Percentage*	*Numbers*	*Percentage*
1 March 1995	595.0	4.3	527.5	4.7
1 April 1994	452.0	3.2	389.0	3.4
1 April 1993	379.5	2.6	191.5	2.2
1 April 1992	457.0	3.0	229.0	2.4
1 April 1991	591.5	3.7	235.0	2.5
1 April 1990	716.0	4.6	280.5	4.1

In addition, my Department employs some staff on a "call off" basis, for example to support short-term fluctuations in work load. My Department does not hold a central record which distinguishes between contracts of 51 weeks and less than 51 weeks.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for this year and each of the past five years how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Norris: The Department's personnel information system records the following number of temporary employees for this year and the last five years who have been re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date:

	Department of Transport	*Of which: Agencies*
1990–91	35	13
1991–92	21	7
1992–93	23	13
1993–94	29	21
1994–95	33	31

In addition, my Department employs some staff on a "call off" basis, for example to support short term fluctuations in work load. My Department does not hold a central record which distinguishes between contracts of 51 weeks and less than 51 weeks.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Norris: My Department employs staff on temporary contracts to meet its short-term needs and as such these needs are difficult to forecast. However, the total number of staff in the Department will reduce over the next three years as a result of its efficiency plans and it is expected that the need for temporary staff will also reduce. Nor is it possible to forecast whether previous temporary contracts will be renewed.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Norris: I have today arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Library of the House.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Norris: The Department's personnel system records in the following table the number of post by grade in the Department as a whole and executive agencies specifically which are filled by employees on temporary contracts of less than one year according to the Department's personnel information systems as at 1 March 1995. The length of the contracts lasting less than one year is not normally agreed in advance and separate records are not kept showing the length of the contracts.

Grade title	*DOT*	*Of which: agencies*
Grade 7	3.0	0
Senior Executive Officer	0.5	0.5
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	2.0	2.0
Nautical Surveyor 1	1.0	0

Grade title	DOT	Of which: agencies
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	7.0	7.0
Nautical Surveyor 2	2.0	2.0
Higher Executive Officer	1.0	1.0
Professional and Technology Officer	2.5	2.5
Driving Examiner	26.0	26.0
Administrative Officer	121.5	99.5
Assistant Vehicle Examiner	0.5	0.5
Support Grade—Band 1	1.0	1.0
Administrative Assistant	385.5	346.5
Support Grade—Band 2	30.0	30.0
Support Grade—Band 2A	4.0	4.0
Typist	7.5	5.0
Total	595	527.5

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Norris: I have today arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Library of the House.

Railway Facilities, Abbey Wood

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated total cost of the railway facilities at the procurement executive headquarters at Abbey Wood.

Mr. Watts: The estimated cost of the new railway facilities at Abbey Wood is £1.056 million.

Fares, London

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the levels of fares a typical resident of Hornsey and Wood Green would pay for short one-mile and three-mile single bus journeys—Dickinson Road to Finsbury Park and Muswell Hill to Archway—three and six-mile single London Underground fares—Finsbury Park to Euston and Wood Green to Oxford Circus today covering zones 1, 2 and 1, 2 and 1, 2, 3 and a five-mile BR fare—Wood Green-Alexandra Palace to Kings Cross; and if he will list the percentage increase for every change compared with the percentage change in the cost of living index from 1 March and 1 September for each year since 1965;

(2) what was the average price including promotional discounting of a gallon of petrol, the price of a one-mile single bus fare in Central London and a three-mile single underground fare, today covering zones 1 and 2, applying on 1 March and 1 September for each year since 1968.

Mr. Norris: The information requested on bus and London Underground fares, provided by London Transport, and on petrol prices is shown in the table.

The current BR single fare from Alexandra Palace to Kings Cross is £1.80. The return fare is £3.60. There is also a cheap day return fare of £2.00. The information requested on fares in previous years is not centrally held by the Department or British Rail.

	Fares in pence				*Petrol in pence per gallon*	*Percentage increases compared to the retail prices index*			
	Bus		*LUL*			*Bus*		*LUL*	
	1 mile	*3 miles*	*3 miles*	*6 miles*		*1 mile*	*3 miles*	*3 miles*	*6 miles*
1965	2	3	5	10	26.5	—	—	—	—
1966	2	3	5	11	25.8	–3.7	–3.7	–3.7	6.0
1967	2	3	5	11	27.5	–2.4	–2.4	–2.4	–2.4
1968	2	3	5	11	27.9	–4.6	–4.6	–4.6	–4.6
1969	2.5	4	5	11	31.5	18.9	26.8	–4.9	–4.9
1970	2.5	5	7.5	12.5	32.5	–6.1	17.3	40.8	6.7
1971	4	5	5	15	33.7	46.5	–8.4	–38.9	9.9
1972	4	5	10	20	35.0	–7.0	–7.0	86.1	24.1
1973	4	5	15	20	35.0	–8.3	–8.3	37.5	–8.3
1974	4	5	15	20	42.0	–13.8	–13.8	–13.8	–13.8
1975	4	5	15	20	72.5	–19.5	–19.5	–19.5	–19.5
1976	6	8	20	35	76.5	28.7	37.3	14.4	50.2
1977	10	10	25	40	79.5	43.9	7.9	7.9	–1.4
1978	10	12	30	45	76.2	–7.7	10.8	10.8	3.9
1979	12	13	30	45	79.6	5.8	–4.5	–11.8	–11.8
1980	20	20	40	60	120.0	41.3	30.4	13.0	13.0
1981	25	25	50	80	132.1	11.7	11.7	11.7	19.2
1982	20	20	50	80	159.2	–26.3	–26.3	–7.9	–7.9
1983	30	40	60	100	166.8	43.4	91.2	14.7	19.5
1984	20	30	60	100	183.4	–36.5	–28.5	–4.7	–4.7
1985	25	30	60	90	188.8	17.8	–5.7	–5.7	–15.2
1986	30	30	60	90	189.2	15.6	–3.7	–3.7	–3.7
1987	30	35	70	100	174.7	–3.6	12.5	12.5	7.1
1988	30	40	80	110	167.2	–4.7	8.9	8.9	4.9
1989	30	40	90	120	168.8	–7.2	–7.2	4.4	1.2
1990	30	45	100	130	186.0	–8.7	2.8	1.5	–1.0
1991	40	50	110	140	205.2	26.0	5.0	3.9	1.7
1992	40	60	120	150	213.3	–3.6	15.7	5.2	3.3
1993	40	70	120	160	233.1	–1.5	14.9	–1.5	5.1
1994	40	70	130	170	252.3	–2.5	–2.5	5.6	3.6
1995	50	70	130	180	270.4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = Not yet available.

Fares information is for 1 March each year. Petrol prices are the typical cost of a gallon of 4 star leaded petrol on 15 January each year.

	Fares in Pence				Percentage of increases compared to the cost of living index			
	Bus		LUL		Bus		LUL	
	1 mile	3 miles	3 miles	6 miles	1 miles	3 miles	3 miles	6 miles
1965	2	3	5	10	—	—	—	—
1966	2	3	5	11	-3.7	-3.7	-3.7	6.0
1967	2	3	5	11	-2.4	-2.4	-2.4	-2.4
1968	2	3	5	11	-4.6	-4.6	-4.6	-4.6
1969	2.5	4	5	11	18.9	26.8	-4.9	-4.9
1970	2.5	5	7.5	12.5	-6.1	17.3	40.8	6.7
1971	4	5	5	15	46.5	-8.4	-38.9	9.9
1972	4	5	10	20	-7.0	-7.0	86.1	24.1
1973	4	5	15	20	-8.3	-8.3	37.5	-8.3
1974	4	5	15	20	-13.8	-13.8	-13.8	-13.8
1975	4	5	15	20	-19.5	-19.5	-19.5	-19.5
1976	6	8	20	35	28.7	37.3	14.4	50.2
1977	10	10	25	40	43.9	7.9	7.9	-1.4
1978	10	12	30	45	-7.7	10.8	10.8	3.9
1979	12	13	30	45	5.8	-4.5	-11.8	-11.8
1980	20	20	40	60	41.3	30.4	13.0	13.0
1981	25	25	50	80	11.7	11.7	11.7	19.2
1982	20	20	50	80	-26.3	-26.3	-7.9	-7.9
1983	30	40	60	100	43.4	91.2	14.7	19.5
1984	20	30	60	100	-36.5	-28.5	-4.7	-4.7
1985	25	30	60	90	17.8	-5.7	-5.7	-15.2
1986	30	30	60	90	15.6	-3.7	-3.7	-3.7
1987	30	35	70	100	-3.6	12.5	12.5	7.1
1988	30	40	80	110	-4.7	8.9	8.9	4.9
1989	30	40	90	120	-7.2	-7.2	4.4	1.2
1990	30	45	100	130	-8.7	2.8	1.5	-1.0
1991	40	50	110	140	26.0	5.0	3.9	1.7
1992	40	60	120	150	-3.6	15.7	5.2	3.3
1993	40	70	120	160	-1.5	14.9	-1.5	5.1
1994	40	70	130	170	-2.5	-2.5	5.6	3.6
1995	50	70	130	180	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a=Not yet available.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the increase or decrease in the average price including promotional discounting of a gallon of petrol, the cost of a one-mile single bus fare in Central London and a three-mile single underground fare, today covering zones 1 and 2, compared to the index of average wages on 1 March and 1 September for each year since 1965.

Mr. Norris: The information requested on bus and London Underground fares and petrol prices in relation to the index of average wages are shown in the table.

Percentage changes in fares and petrol prices compared to the index of average wages

	Bus	LUL	Petrol
1965	—	—	—
1966	-3.9	-3.9	-6.3
1967	-6.2	-6.2	-0.1
1968	-8.0	-8.0	-6.6
1969	15.8	-7.4	4.7
1970	-12.8	30.7	-10.2
1971	47.8	-38.4	-4.1
1972	-13.2	73.5	-10.0
1973	-7.5	38.8	-7.5
1974	-25.0	-25.0	-10.0
1975	-17.6	-17.6	42.2
1976	35.2	20.2	-4.9
1977	52.2	14.2	-5.1
1978	-10.5	7.4	-14.3
1979	-0.4	-17.0	-13.3
1980	40.6	12.5	27.2
1981	12.8	12.8	-0.7
1982	-26.5	-8.1	10.8
1983	40.2	12.1	-2.1
1984	-37.6	-6.4	2.9
1985	15.4	-7.7	-5.0

Percentage changes in fares and petrol prices compared to the index of average wages

	Bus	LUL	Petrol
1986	11.6	-7.0	-6.8
1987	-7.7	7.7	-14.8
1988	-8.4	4.6	-12.3
1989	-8.5	3.0	-7.6
1990	-8.4	1.8	0.9
1991	24.6	2.8	3.1
1992	-4.4	4.3	-0.5
1993	-3.5	-3.5	5.5
1994	-2.7	5.4	5.3
1995	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a=Not yet available.

Fares information is for 1 March each year. Petrol prices are the typical cost of a gallon of 4 star leaded petrol on 15 January each year.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the relative increase or decrease compared with the retail prices index of the average price including promotional discounting of a gallon of petrol compared with the cost of a one-mile single bus fare, in central London and a three-mile single London Underground fare today covering zones 1 and 2, on 1 March and 1 September for each year since 1965;

(2) if he will list the relative increase or decrease in cash terms of the average price including promotional discounting of a gallon of petrol compared with the cost of a one-mile single bus fare in central London and a three-mile single London Underground fare, today covering zones 1 and 2, on 1 March and 1 September for each year since 1965.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage changes in petrol prices compared to fares

	Cash terms Bus	LUL
1965	—	—
1965	-2.4	-2.4
1967	6.5	6.5
1968	1.5	1.5
1969	-9.6	13.0
1970	3.0	-31.3
1971	-35.1	55.7
1972	3.8	-48.1
1973	0.0	-33.3
1974	20.0	20.0
1975	72.6	72.6
1976	-29.7	-20.9
1977	-37.6	-16.9
1978	-4.2	-20.1
1979	-13.0	4.4
1980	-9.5	13.1
1981	-11.9	-11.9
1982	50.7	20.6
1983	-30.1	-12.7
1984	64.9	9.9
1985	-17.6	2.9
1986	-16.5	0.2
1987	-7.7	-20.9
1988	-4.2	-16.2
1989	1.0	-10.3
1990	10.2	-0.8
1991	-17.3	0.3
1992	4.0	-4.7
1993	9.2	9.2
1994	9.2	9.2
1995	8.3	-0.1

Fares information is for 1 March each year Petrol prices are the typical cost of a gallon of 4 star leaded petrol on 15 January each year.

For each year and change in petrol relative to fares is the same whether real or cash values are used.

Safety at Sea

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will investigate the implications for safety of life at sea arising from the effects on crew fatigue of a rota of two months on and two months off on cross-channel ferries;

(2) which classification societies are currently undertaking work on behalf of the Marine Safety Agency.

Mr. Norris: There are operational matters for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letters from R.M. Bradley to Ms Joan Walley, dated 15 March 1995:

The Secretary of Sate has asked me to reply to your Question about the crew fatigue effects of a two months on/two months off rota on cross-Channel ferries.

The Agency is not intending to investigate the implications of the crew rota to which you refer. It considers that the regulatory and inspection framework which I describe in this letter are sufficient to ensure that crewing arrangements on UK-flagged ships do not impair safety.

Crewing arrangements on UK-flagged ships are primarily the responsibility of the ship-owner or operator to determine, within the requirements of the law. The minimum manning levels for these ships are laid down by the Department under the Merchant Shipping (Safe Manning Document) Regulations 1992. Broadly speaking, every UK ship of 500 GRT or more must carry a Safe Manning Document issued by this Agency and the manning of the ship must be maintained at all times to at least the levels specified in the document. These levels take account of a range of considerations, including the Department's concern that ships should be sufficiently manned for their safe operation having regard to the area in which they will be trading and the nature of the service for which they are intended. The Department has also just introduced the Merchant Shipping (Hours of Work) Regulations 1995 which place a duty on ship operators to ensure that crews do not work more hours than are safe in relation to the safety of the ship. In addition, Section 31 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 places a duty on shipowners to ensure that their ships are operated in a safe manner.

As part of its flag state responsibilities, the Agency inspects UK-flagged ships on a regular basis to ensure, amongst other things, that they are crewed in accordance with the safe manning document. The inspectors will also now ensure that the crews' working arrangements comply with the 1995 regulations. If crewing arrangements do not meet legal requirements, the ship may be detained until the matter has been resolved to the Agency's satisfaction.

Foreign-flagged ships working into UK ports come under the jurisdiction of the state with which they are registered and must therefore comply with these states' requirements in respect of crewing arrangements. However, these ships are subject to portstate control inspections by the Agency. If the inspector considers that the manning of a foreign-flagged ship is unsafe, the ship can be detained until the matter is resolved with the flag state administration and the ship's owners to the Agency's satisfaction.

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about Classification Societies undertaking work on behalf of the Marine Safety Agency.

The Marine Safety Agency authorises five Classification Societies to undertake work on its behalf, namely:

Lloyd's Register of Shipping
American Bureau of Shipping
Bureau Veritas
Det Norske Veritas and
Germanischer Lloyd

Train Services, Wales

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with representatives of the rail operators the frequency of train services on Welsh main lines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The frequency of train services is, at present, an operational matter for British Rail. The franchising director is currently consulting on the passenger service requirements to be included in the Great Western franchise. He will be consulting on passenger service requirements for other franchises providing services in Wales in due course.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

(a) 1994–95 (up to 1 February): £541,429

(b) 1993–94: £654,043
1992–93: £626,800
1991–92: £592,829

Cap Bon

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when inspections of the Cap Bon were carried out; who carried them out; what was the assessment; how

many deficiencies were found; when he expects the boat to resume the carrying of livestock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 15 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the inspection of the cargo ship 'CAP BON'.

The ship was last inspected by the French port state control authorities in Dieppe on 1 March 1995. Their inspection identified fifty-six safety deficiencies and the ship was detained. The ship was subsequently released after fifty-one of the deficiencies had been rectified. The ship has not visited a UK port recently but if she were to, she would be subject to the UK's port state control regime.

The carrying of livestock on the vessel is a matter for the owners and the authorities of the port to which the ship operates.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Borrowing

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list the amounts borrowed *(a)* directly and *(b)* via group companies by the Church Commissioners and the total interest paid for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Alison: This information is set out in the following table. Since 1990, considerable progress has been made in reducing borrowings.

Church Commissioners Amounts borrowed and interest paid

£ million

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Borrowings in Church Commissioners' name	—	—	116.2	234.4	311.8	429.7	330.0	244.4	184.9	173.2
Borrowings by subsidiaries	4.7	10.7	53.1	80.2	136.1	88.3	52.7	35.7	39.6	17.5
Total borrowings	4.7	10.7	169.3	314.6	447.9	518.0	382.7	280.1	224.5	190.7
Total interest paid	0.5	0.6	3.4	13.4	35.9	50.0	52.2	37.8	19.4	12.9

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Green Forms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many green form legal advice and assistance payments were made to solicitors in each year since 1991, and if he will make a statement;

(2) what were the total sums paid out in respect of green form legal advice and assistance claims by solicitors in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The volume of bills paid and total paid out in respect of green form legal advice and assistance claims by solicitors between 1991–92 and 1993–94 was as follows:

Year	*Number of bills paid*	*Total payments £000*
1991–92	1,230,472	100,434
1992–93	1,434,661	124,533
1993–94	1,640,593	147,233

Legal Aid

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals to the Legal Aid Board against the refusal to grant legal aid for civil cases there were in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The number of appeals against refusal of legal aid certificates for civil cases for the years 1991–92 to 1993–94 was as follows:

Year	*Appeals received*	*Appeals granted*
1991–92	22,073	8,804
1992–93	28,053	14,118
1993–94	42,089	21,991

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the estimated cost to the legal aid fund of the defence of Mr. Craig Charles, and what statement of income and capital he produced for the Legal Aid Board.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I consider it inappropriate to speculate as to the final cost to the legal aid fund of the proceedings involving Mr. Craig Charles. Details of the financial means of applicants for legal aid are confidential.

Divorce Law Reform

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he intends to publish his White Paper on divorce law reform.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to him on 13 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *213*.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

BBC

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the current proportion of BBC network television production which emanates from the regions and national regions; and what target figure he has set or accepted.

Mr. Dorrell: Statistics on programme production should be sought direct from the BBC. I expect the BBC to include in its statement of promises to audiences quantifiable targets for increasing the proportion of network programmes made outside London and south-east England.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to appoint a replacement for Sir David Scholey as a governor of the BBC; and what criteria he intends to apply to this appointment.

Mr. Dorrell: BBC governors are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen on the advice of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I hope that the vacancy created by Sir David Scholey's resignation will be filled without delay. In seeking a successor, regard will be had to the range of qualities and experience which the board of governors as a whole needs to possess in order to carry out its responsibilities.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if it remains the policy of his Department that the agreement document between the BBC and Government will contain an undertaking on regional network production.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes.

Television Licences

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his latest estimate of the evasion rate for television licences; how much lost revenue this represents; what measures are being taken to help those who have difficulty paying for a television licence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The estimated rate of television licence evasion as at January 1995 was 6.8 per cent. which represents approximately £152 million in lost revenue. The television licensing regulations provide for quarterly and monthly payment schemes to enable people to spread the cost of their licence fee. There is also a television licence savings stamps scheme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Selective Assistance

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for assisted area status are completed in 60 working days from date of final application to offer of grant; and how many are not.

Mr. Eggar: Of the 1,215 offers of regional selective assistance made in England during 1994, 984 were processed within 60 working days from receipt of application.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the home shipbuilding credit guarantee scheme.

Mr. Eggar: In order to assist the competitiveness of the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry, I am introducing a new facility whereby the scheme can guarantee loans of up to 12 years duration for the purchase of new commercial ships from UK shipyards. Small vessels of less than £1 million contract cost will carry shorter credit periods. The normal maximum length of loan for ship conversions will be 10 years.

Loans for up to 8.5 years at an interest rate of 7.5 per cent. will continue to be available. If a loan of more than 8.5 years is guaranteed, the component of the lending which represents an 8.5 year loan will carry the 7.5 per cent. interest rate. The additional lending resulting from the extended term will be at the commercial interest reference rate applicable to comparable export credit transactions. This arrangement is necessary to retain present interest rate subsidies while complying with EC requirements.

The premium for 12-year finance will be 1 per cent. of the capital sum guaranteed, and for 10-year finance will be 0.8 per cent. of the capital sum guaranteed. A revised premium of two thirds of 1 per cent. of the capital sum guaranteed will apply in respect of finance of 8.5 years or less, for which application is made on or after 1 April 1995.

The arrangements have been authorised by the EC Commission as consistent with the seventh EC shipbuilding directive. However, the Commission has ruled that guarantees of lending for more than 8.5 years should be considered to carry a subsidy level of 1 per cent. of contract value, for the purposes of the ceilings on shipbuilding support laid down in the directive. The size of this adjustment to the subsidy level is under discussion with the Commission. Guarantees of lending of 8.5 years duration or less are unaffected by the ruling.

These arrangements will apply until the end of 1995, when the OECD agreement on the elimination of shipbuilding subsidies comes into force. The future of the scheme, after the end of the year, is subject to review.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade at what time and on what day the proposals of Professor Littlechild to regulate energy prices further were first drawn to the attention of departmental officials or Ministers.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* There has been a growing public debate in recent months about whether the price control for the regional electricity companies' distribution businesses struck a fair balance between the interests of consumers and shareholders. The Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric which was announced on 19 December 1994 and Northern Electric's defence added substantially to the concerns being expressed. A wide range of options were canvassed during this debate. There are regular contacts between the Department and Offer on all regulatory matters. Offer kept the Department regularly informed on Professor Littlechild's thinking from 27 February. The decision to consider further a review of the proposals for the new price controls was taken by Professor Littlechild on 6 March 1995.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade at what time and on what day departmental officials or Ministers first saw either the statement or a synopsis of the statement made by Professor Littlechild on the question of the further regulation of electricity prices.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* At circa 16.45 on Monday 6 March, my officials first saw a draft of the statement Professor Littlechild planned to make the

following day about the price controls on the distribution businesses of the regional electricity companies.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department had with the Director General of Electricity Supply prior to his announcement about prices of electricity.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* There has been a growing public debate in recent months about whether the price control for the regional electricity companies' distribution businesses struck a fair balance between the interests of consumers and shareholders. The Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric which was announced on 19 December 1994 and Northern Electric's defence added substantially to the concerns being expressed. A wide range of options were canvassed during this debate. Offer kept the Department regularly informed on the way Professor Littlechild's thinking was developing throughout the period from 27 February 1995 until his announcement on 7 March.

Monopolies and Mergers

Mr. David Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers he or the Director General of Fair Trading have to require divestment.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has powers to require divestment to remedy adverse findings of reports by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on monopoly or mergers situations. He can also require divestment where an undertaking to divest which has been accepted in lieu of a reference to the commission has not been fulfilled.

Patent Office

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes have taken place in the numbers of staff employed in the Patent Office since last year in *(a)* established staff, *(b)* fixed-term appointees, *(c)* agency staff and *(d)* consultants; and if he will explain the reasons for the changes.

Mr. Ian Taylor: On 28 February 1994, there were 902 established staff in the Patent Office; 59 fixed-term appointees; 31 Manpower agency staff; and 27 non-established IT specialists, working in the office on individual contracts. Comparable figures at 28 February 1995 were 839; 49; 45; and 31.

The decline in overall numbers, including numbers of established staff and fixed-term appointees, reflects efficiency improvements and changes in work volumes, and was accommodated as part of normal staff turnover. At the same time, use of IT in the office has grown, and a major systems development has been necessary to implement new trade marks legislation. The increase in the number of agency staff reflects the outcome of a market testing programme in the previous year.

Power Generating Companies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department had with the Director General of Electricity Supply about the sale of publicly owned shares in the power generating companies.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* There were a number of discussions between my Department and Offer about the sale of publicly owned shares in the generating companies during the preparation of the prospectuses and prior to the float.

Assisted Areas

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to reduce from 60 working days the target for approval of assisted area status applications.

Mr. Eggar: Targets vary in relation to the size band of project. These targets are kept under regular review.

Competitiveness

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last received from Her Majesty's embassies in Washington, Bonn, and Tokyo an assessment of each host nation's trade competitiveness at home and abroad.

Mr. Eggar: Embassies have standing orders to cover competitiveness issues in their regular economic reports.

Newsagents

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on carriage charges by news wholesalers to newsagents.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission's 1993 report on the supply of newspapers in England and Wales included no adverse public interest findings in respect of carriage charges, and therefore no power arose to act on them.

However, carriage charges in respect of new entrants are covered by the voluntary code of practice to govern the supply of national newspapers, agreed with the industry following publication of the MMC report. This provides that such charges should be set at an economic level in order that they are not used as a means of circumventing the prohibition on refusal to supply by making supply economically unattractive to new applicants.

If new retailers feel that their carriage charges are incorrect they should take the matter up in the first instance with the wholesaler. If this does not resolve the dispute, the retailer should make use of the arbitration process set out in the code of practice.

Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the undertaking given by the Indonesian Government about the proposed use of the Scorpion tanks and light armoured vehicles for which he has given export licence approval.

Mr. Heseltine: The assurances are precisely as given in my answer on 2 March 1995 to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), *Official Report*, column *716*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Probation Hostels

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female juveniles are kept in probation hostels.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The figures requested are not held centrally and are not readily available.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places are available in probation hostels.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The number of places currently available in approved hostels is 2,464.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department regularly holds with organisations dealing with solvent abuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are a number of Government Departments which have responsibilities covering volatile substance abuse. They have periodic contacts with interested organisations rather than regular discussions. I understand that Department of Health officials last met representatives Re-Solv, the Society for the Prevention of Solvent and Volatile Substance Abuse, on 24 October.

Safer Cities

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will consider safer city status for Stoke-on-Trent.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

Stoke-on-Trent was one of a number of areas considered for inclusion in the latest wave of safer cities projects announced in July of last year. However, the 20 areas selected were deemed to have a stronger claim to a project at that time.

Decisions about a further wave of safer cities projects have not yet been taken.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constitute;

(2) how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract;

(3) for the current year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks, or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

(4) what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration;

(5) what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department;

(6) if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Home Office and its agencies employ casual staff to meet short-term or seasonal needs. No central record is available of casual staff employed in recent years, or of the duration of their contracts. The number of casual staff currently employed is set out in the following table. Contracts normally set out the expected period of employment; none of the above staff have been engaged on contracts of 51 weeks.

The appointment and conditions of employment of casual staff are in accordance with the provisions of the civil service management code. It is not possible to anticipate the number of casual staff likely to be required in the next three years.

Casual staff employed in the Home Office and its Agencies on 13 March 1995

Grade	*SGB 2*		*Admin. assts.*		*Admin. officers*		*Exec. officers*		*Other grade(s)*		*Total staff*	
	Number of casuals	*Percentage of grade*	*Number of casuals*	*Percentage of grade*	*Number of casuals*	*Percentage of grade*	*Number of casuals*	*Percentage of grade*	*Number of casuals*	*Percentage of grade*	*Number of casuals*	*Percentage of grade*
Home Office	20	5.6	74	8.9	13	1	2	0.2	13	3.4	122	1.4
UK Passport Agency	18	22.5	287	44.7	nil	nil	nil	nil	2	9.5	307	19.6
Fire Service College	nil	nil	1	10	2	6.5	1	7.7	1	100	5	2.6
Forensic Science Service	1	2.5	5	12.5	1	3.3	2	15.4	1	1.7	10	1.4

The Prison Service does not maintain a central record of casual appointments, some of which are made locally in establishments.

Domestic Violence Units

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those police authorities which have set up police domestic violence units; how many units there are per police authority; and what is the location of the units.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The

establishment of domestic violence units is an operational matter for the chief officers of police.

Female Juveniles

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female juveniles at present are kept in adult women prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 15 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many female juveniles at present are kept in adult women prisons.

The latest available provisional information is for 31 January 1995. On that date 29 females (14 remand and 15 sentenced) aged under 18 years of age were held in adult female Prison Service establishments (local prisons, closed training prisons or open prisons) in England and Wales.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what establishments are currently being used for detention of asylum seekers; how many are held in each one; and what is their country of origin;

(2) how many asylum seekers are currently held in custody; and what is the comparative figure for each month of the past year.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As at 8 March 1995, a total of 587 persons who had sought asylum were detained. This figure includes people awaiting the setting of directions for removal following refusal of the application, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal. Information on the nationality of those detained is given in the table.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on 2 March, column *660*, which gave the available information on the location of those persons who had sought asylum detained as at 23 February 1995.

Information on the numbers detained over the last year, by month, is not available.

Table 1
Number of people detained on 8 March 1995 who had sought asylum, by nationality

Country	*Number detained*
Angola	13
Albania	9
Algeria	58
Armenia	1
Bangladesh	18
Benin	1
Brazil	6
Bulgaria	2
Burma	3
Cameroon	3
China	19
Colombia	7
Dominica	1
Ecuador	3
Eritrea	1
Gambia	3
Georgia	5
Ghana	65
India	69
Iran	4
Ivory Coast	6
Jamaica	5
Kenya	4
Lebanon	4
Liberia	3
Libya	6
Sri Lanka	22
Moldavia	1
Morocco	8
Mozambique	1
Nigeria	109
Pakistan	26
Philippines	1
Poland	1
Romania	9
Russia	3
Sudan	2
Sierra Leone	8
Somalia	2
Slovakia	1
South Africa	3
Sudan	2
Thailand	1
Togo	1
Tunisia	1
Turkey	25
Uganda	1
Former Yugoslavia	14
Zaire	11
Zambia	1
Total	587

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers currently detained under Immigration Act powers by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* length of detention, *(d)* place of detention and *(e)* immigration status at the time of application;

(2) how many asylum seekers were detained under Immigration Act powers in each month in 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As at 8 March 1995, a total of 587 persons who had sought asylum were detained. This figure includes people awaiting the setting of directions for removal following refusal of the application, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal. Of this figure, 153 had been in detention less than one month, 104 between one and two months, 230 between two and six months, and 100 had been in detention longer than six months.

Information on the gender, immigration status and nationality of those detained is given in tables 1 and 2.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on 2 March, column *660*, which gave the available information on the location of those persons who had sought asylum detained as at 23 February 1995.

Information on the numbers detained during 1993 and 1994, by month, is not available.

Table 1: Number of people detained on 8 March 1995 who had sought asylum, by immigration status and gender

Immigration Status	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Port case	247	26	273
Illegal entrant case	240	9	249
Deportation case	57	8	65
Total	544	43	587

Table 2: Number of people detained on 8 March 1995 who had sought asylum, by nationality

Country	*Number detained*
Angola	13
Albania	9
Algeria	58
Armenia	1
Bangladesh	18
Benin	1
Brazil	6
Bulgaria	2
Burma	3
Cameroon	3
China	19
Columbia	7
Dominica	1
Ecuador	3
Eritrea	1
Gambia	3
Georgia	5
Ghana	65
India	69
Iran	4
Ivory Coast	6
Jamaica	5
Kenya	4
Lebanon	4
Liberia	3
Libya	6
Sri Lanka	22
Moldavia	1
Morocco	8
Mozambique	1
Nigeria	109
Pakistan	26
Philippines	1
Poland	1
Romania	9
Russia	3
Sudan	2
Sierra Leone	8
Somalia	2
Slovakia	1
South Africa	3
Sudan	2
Thailand	1
Togo	1
Tunisia	1
Turkey	25
Uganda	1
Former Yugoslavia	14
Zaire	11
Zambia	1
Total	587

HEALTH

Secure Units

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many places are available in secure units;

(2) how many juveniles are kept in secure units.

Mr. Bowis: The most recent figures available centrally relate to 31 March 1994 when there were 289 places available in secure units and 244 juveniles accommodated.

Smoking, Richmond House

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities are provided and arrangements made for the comfort and well-being of staff who *(a)* smoke and *(b)* do not wish to be affected by smoking at (i) the work station and (ii) rest, recreation and refreshment facilities at Richmond house, Whitehall.

Mr. Sackville: No smoking is allowed in Richmond house except in the six rooms specifically set aside for that purpose.

NHS Openness

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish the open government code for the health service and the accompanying guidance.

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the outcome of the consultation on the draft code of practice on openness in the national health service. We intend to publish the code shortly, together with the arrangements for its implementation.

Chemotherapy

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research her Department is conducting into high-dose chemotherapy with stem cell treatment as a treatment for breast cancer; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what reports she has sought from the United States of America about the effectiveness of high-dose chemotherapy with stem cell treatment as a treatment for breast cancer; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is not conducting research into the use of high-dose chemotherapy with stem cell support but we are aware of research both in this country and abroad. In some quite rare tumours, the technique of peripheral stem cell harvesting and high-dose chemotherapy is becoming well established. It is however, a relatively new procedure and for the most common cancers, treatment should be given only as part of a properly designed clinical trial.

Surgery Costs

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will update her answer of 1 December 1993 to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), *Official Report*, column *578*, on the average costs of NHS procedures in the categories in the previous answer.

Mr. Sackville: The costing systems in the national health service are currently under review to enable the methodologies used to be standardised in all hospitals.

Minor Accident Treatment

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department gives as to the opening hours of a minor accident treatment service unit.

Mr. Sackville: Opening times for minor conditions centres are determined by individual hospital trusts according to local needs.

Social Workers

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the implications of the results of the recent survey in "Care Weekly" on violence towards social workers, a copy of which has been sent to her, in respect of her policy on the national recording of such incidents; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The full survey has not yet been received by my right hon. Friend. However, local authorities and other employers are responsible for identifying any problem and for taking any action needed to provide a safe working environment for all their staff, including social work staff. This includes collecting any information they need to enable them to carry out this responsibility effectively.

Barnet Health Authority

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional ambulances will be assigned to the Barnet health authority in 1995; and what plans there are to increase their number in the future.

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend may wish to contact the chief executive of the London ambulance service, Mr. Martin Gorham, for details.

Hospital Beds, Barnet

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current number of hospital beds and their location in the borough of Barnet; and how many are planned between now and 1997.

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend may wish to contact the chairman of Barnet health authority, Mr. Brian Salinger, for details.

Services for the Blind

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to fund the RNIB to promote services for the blind and partially-sighted, with special reference to the elderly in nursing homes, hospices and home care.

Mr. Bowis: The Royal National Institute for the Blind has not applied for funding for the promotion of services for visually impaired elderly people in nursing homes, hospices and home care services.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for the current year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which her Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Sackville: The Department and its executive agencies do not keep records on this issue. The Department does not usually issue contracts of 51 weeks. There are five casual staff in the Department and five in its executive agencies on temporary contracts of less than 51 weeks who have been re-employed since 1 April 1994.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by her Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for the current year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constituted.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not keep records on those employed on temporary contracts before 1 April 1994. The Department and its executive agencies do not usually issue contracts of 51 weeks. Since 1 April 1994, 207 staff in the Department—4 per cent.—and 47 in its executive agencies—3 per cent.—have been employed on temporary contracts of less than 51 weeks.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people she expects to employ in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which she is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Sackville: The Department and its executive agencies do not usually issue contracts of 51 weeks. The Department expects to use a small percentage of temporary staff to cover specific management needs. It is not possible to predict exactly how many people will be employed on this basis over the next three years but we do not expect the present level to change significantly.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment on non-payment employees in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by her Department.

Mr. Sackville: The Department and its agencies follow guidance on recruitment and appointment procedures set down in the civil service management code and the Department's own conditions of service manual.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in her Department and all executive agencies for which she is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Sackville: The Department and its executive agencies do not usually issue contracts of 51 weeks. All temporary staff in the Department of Health and its executive agencies are employed on either a casual basis or on fixed-term appointments. Examples of their full terms of employment will be placed in the Library. These terms apply irrespective of whether the contract is for 51 weeks or less.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what positions in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which her Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Sackville: The Department and its executive agencies do not usually issue contracts of 51 weeks. The

information requested for those employed on contracts for less than 51 weeks is shown in the table.

Fixed Term Appointments and Casuals	*Total DH*	*Agencies*[1]
Unified Grade 7	5	—
Senior Executive Officer	1	1
Executive Officer	8	1
Administrative Officer	46	8
Administrative Assistant	70	14
Personal Secretary	4	1
Typist	1	1
Support Grade (2)	16	5
Senior Medical Officers	6	6
Principal Pharamaceutical Officers	1	—
Social Services Inspectors	1	—
Senior Scientific Officers	1	1
Assistant Scientific Officers	5	5
Scientific Officers	7	7
Nursing Officers	2	—
Information Officers	1	—
Senior Assistant Statistician	1	—
Assistant Statistician	5	—
Regional Child Care Officer	7	7
Regional Child Care Officer (2)	1	1
Regional Child Care Officer (3)	1	1
Catering Manager (3)	1	1
Domestic	1	1
Sandwich Course Student	15	—

Note:
[1]Includes the Youth Treatment Service Executive Unit and the Medical Devices Agency which was formed in October 1994.
Source:
Departmental records.

Pharmacies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on non-contract pharmacies in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: This is one of a number of issues that relate to the operation of the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992, as amended, and which the Department is keeping under careful review. Changes to the regulations have not been ruled out but we want to listen to all sides of the arguments being put to us before reaching a final conclusion.

Patient Placements

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate her Department has made of *(a)* the average number of hours spent each week by a hospital doctor in searching for a placement for critically ill patients, and *(b)* the total number of hours spent by hospital doctors in the last year in searching for placements for critically ill patients.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

General Practices

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *874*, what are the aggregate numbers of general practices in the fundholding and non-fundholding categories, the total numbers of general practitioners in each category on a full-time equivalent basis and the numbers of list patients covered, at each of the dates specified.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The available information will be placed in the Library.

Death Rates

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the death rates per 1,000 men aged 15 to 44 years for the average of three years from 1970 to 1972, 1980 to 1982 and 1990 to 1992, using mid-year population estimates for 1971, 1981, and 1991; if she will give figures *(a)* per district health authority with 95 per cent. confidence limits, *(b)* per regional health authority and *(c)* nationally; and if she will also show the above rates excluding suicide and accidents.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* The available information will be placed in the Library. Information relating to 1970 to 1972 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the age standardised death rates per 1,000 population for the average of the three years 1970 to 1972, 1989 to 1982 and 1990 to 1992, using mid-year population estimates for 1971, 1981 and 1991; and if she will give figures *(a)* per district health authority with 95 per cent. confidence limits, *(b)* for each regional health authority and *(c)* nationally.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* The available information will be placed in the Library. Information relating to 1970 to 1972 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nurses

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for each year since 1981, on the same basis as tables A and C of *Statistical Bulletin 19944/11*, the total numbers of whole time equivalent qualified and unqualified nurses and midwives, the total numbers of learners and the total numbers of other nurses and midwives employed in *(a)* the hospital and community health services, *(b)* the family health services and *(c)* private hospitals, nursing homes and clinics, and also the total numbers of Project 2000 students in each year.

Mr. Malone *[pursuant to his reply, 19 January 1995, c. 637–40]:* I regret that my previous reply contained an error. The 1990 "FHS Practice Nurses" was given as 7,700 whereas the correct figure should be 7,740.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the current *(a)* chairs and *(b)* non-executive directors of each trust board by region, indicating the gender and occupation of each individual.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* The latest information available centrally will be placed in the Library.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Attorney-General whether he has reached a decision on the question of agency status for the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

The Attorney-General: I am satisfied that agency status will enable the Treasury Solicitor's department to operate with greater managerial freedom and with more clearly defined responsibilities, within an agreed framework of objectives, performance targets, and resources. The department will become an executive agency on 1 April 1996.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

The Attorney-General: Specimen letters setting out the terms of employment for all staff employed on a temporary contract by the Crown Prosecution Service, Serious Fraud Office and Treasury Solicitor's department accompany this answer and have been supplied to the hon. Member. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. The letter used by the Government Property Lawyers is the same as for the Treasury Solicitor's department.

Ms Harman: To ask the Attorney-General for the current year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

The Attorney-General: The number of employees in the Department and agencies for which I am responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of 51 weeks or less and re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date over the past five years are:

	Crown Prosecution Service	*Serious Fraud Office*	*Treasury Solicitor's Department*	*Government Property Lawyers*
Current year	19	0	1	Nil
1994	88	3	5	Nil
1993	85	3	5	Nil
1992	52	4	1	Nil
1991	46	1	2	Nil
1990	33	0	3	Nil

Ms Harman: To ask the Attorney-General how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible, on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is unable to forecast the number of posts which will be filled by temporary staff in the CPS during the next three years.

The numbers of temporary staff estimated to be employed by the Serious Fraud Office, Treasury Solicitor's department and Government Property Lawyers in each of the next three years is as follows:

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Serious Fraud Office	31	33	35
Treasury Solicitor's Department	7	7	7
Government Property Lawyers	3	3	3

All such employments are expected to be on contracts for less than 51 weeks. It is not possible to predict whether any such temporary staff will have previously been so employed.

Ms Harman: To ask the Attorney-General what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

The Attorney-General: As at 28 February 1995, a total of 17 prosecutor posts were filled by employees on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration. Additionally, 224 administrative staff and 52 staff in other support grades were employed on similar terms.

The Serious Fraud Office at present employs 24 administrative staff and one accountant on temporary contracts of 51 weeks or less.

The Treasury Solicitor's department at present employs eight lawyers, three litigation clerks, four administrative staff and one porter/handyman on temporary contracts of 51 weeks or less.

The Government Property Lawyers at present employs three lawyers and eight administrative staff on temporary contracts of 51 weeks or less.

Ms Harman: To ask the Attorney-General what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

The Attorney-General: The recruitment handbook for the Crown Prosecution Service defines the circumstances in which casual—non-permanent—appointments are appropriate. This has been supplemented by further instructions circulated to all staff with responsibility for recruitment decisions.

The Serious Fraud Office, the Treasury Solicitor's department and the Government Property Lawyers follow the guidance set out in the civil service management code, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff Pay

Mr. Caborn: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what are the rates of pay and other remunerations for all House of Commons porters, chefs, cleaners and security staff.

Mr. Beith: The full-time salaries, inclusive of the recruitment and retention allowance, of the grades employed by the Commission are as follows:

	£
Porters[1]	
Vote office porters	9,390–9,547 pa
Kitchen porters	9,547–10,736 pa
Cleaners	
Cleaners	9,390–9,547 pa
Cleaner in charge	9,870–11,496 pa
Chefs	
Executive chef	27,106–41,003 pa
Deputy executive chef	21,789–27,586 pa
Senior sous chef	14,965–18,611 pa
Sous chef / Assistant sous chef / Chef in charge	13,449–16,677 pa
Section chef	12,984–16,083 pa
Chef de Partie	11,496–14,184 pa
Assistant chef de partie	10,206–11,696 pa
Full commis chef	10,556 pa
3rd year commis chef	10,206 pa
2nd year commis chef	10,036 pa
1st year commis chef	9,870 pa

[1]Part-time employees are paid pro-rata.

The security staff are employed by the Metropolitan police, and I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to write to the hon. Member with details of their rates of pay.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with his United States counterpart as to the capacity and intention of Saddam Hussein in respect of the rebuilding of weapons of mass destruction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has regular contact with his United States and other counterparts about Iraqi compliance with UN Security Council resolutions.

We continue to support the work of the UN Special Commission—UNSCOM—in its task of eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and setting up a monitoring regime to ensure that no regeneration of such weapons can take place.

Ambassador Ekeus will be presenting his next six-monthly report to the UN Security Council in April in which he will assess whether Iraq's past chemical, biological, ballistic and nuclear weapons have been fully accounted for and eliminated, whether Iraq's current capacity is understood, and whether the UNSCOM—IAEA monitoring and verification operation will be sufficient to detect such weapons in the future.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment as to the capacity and intention of the regime of Saddam Hussein to rebuild weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. David Davis: Iraq's record to date gives us good reason to believe that the regime will try to re-activate its programmes of weapons of mass destruction if allowed to do so. Hence our belief in the importance of full implementation of the UN Special Commission and International Atomic Energy Agency monitoring plans which place relevant industrial, academic and civil establishments under close supervision.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the leaders of Iraqi Kurdish groups or to Iraqi resistance groups that they should seek a dialogue with the regime of Saddam Hussein; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is up to the Iraqi opposition themselves to decide whether to engage in dialogue with the regime of Saddam Hussein. We do not suggest that they do so; neither will we discourage them if that is their wish.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what reports he has received relating to the bombardment by forces loyal to Saddam Hussein of the town of Arbil in Northern Iraq with long-range artillery;

(2) what reports he has received indicating attacks by forces loyal to Saddam Husssein on areas of northern Iraq under the control of Kurdish and Iraqi resistance forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 13 March, *Official Report*, column *377*. We have seen no clear evidence that Iraqi forces have recently mounted fresh offensive operations in northern Iraq. However, given the continued tension in the area, and the history of brutality by the Iraqi regime towards the Iraqi Kurds, we will continue to keep the situation under close review.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has reached as to whether the regime of Saddam Hussein still has access to stocks of anthrax bacteria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iraqi regime has access to anthrax bacteria which can be obtained from clinical and environmental samples within Iraq. The monitoring regime now being established by UNSCOM under the terms of UN Security Council resolution 687 aims to ensure that Iraq does not use such material for weapons purposes.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking or will take to guarantee the safe havens of northern Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Aircraft from the US, United Kingdom and France patrol a no-fly zone north of 36 deg north in support of Security Council resolution 688 which demands that Iraq ends its repression of its civilian population.

The purpose of the patrols is to monitor the movements of Iraqi troops close to the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq.

We continue to press Iraq to comply with all the demands in the relevant United Nations Security Council resolution.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what change has taken place in Her Majesty's Government's policy on the question of the negative security assurance given to non-nuclear weapons states that are parties to the

non-proliferation treaty, following the disbanding of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the extent of the exception clause contained in the United Kingdom's negative security assurance.

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom's negative security assurance is extended to non-nuclear-weapon states parties to the non-proliferation treaty or other internationally binding commitments not to manufacture or acquire nuclear explosive devices. The assurance makes it clear that it does no apply in the case of an attack on the United Kingdom, its dependent territories, its armed forces or its allies by such a state in association or alliance with nuclear-weapon-state.

There has been no change to the assurance. The disbanding of the Warsaw pact does not obviate the need for the exception.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is Her Majesty's Government's policy to seek to achieve a decision on the extension of the non-proliferation treaty solely on the basis of consensus of states parties at the extension conference.

Mr. David Davis: Our aim at the nuclear non-proliferation treaty review and extension conference is to achieve the indefinite and unconditional extension of the treaty. Under the terms of the treaty, this can be achieved by a simple majority of state parties.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to declare the exact number of nuclear weapons and warheads deployed by the United Kingdom when he or one of his ministerial colleagues attends the non-proliferation treaty extension conference in April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 9 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *348*. We shall continue to follow this policy at the non-proliferation treaty review and extension conference.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what differences exist between the negative security assurance under the non-proliferation treaty provided by the United Kingdom and that provided by the United States of America.

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom's negative security assurance is given to

"non-nuclear weapon states which are parties to the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to other internationally binding commitments not to manufacture or acquire nuclear explosive devices".

In the assurance Britain undertakes

"not to use nuclear weapons against such States except in the case of an attack on the United Kingdom, its dependent territories, its armed forces or its allies by such a State in association or alliance with a nuclear-weapon State".

The United States, in its negative security assurances, stated that it would

"not use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear-weapon state party to the NPT (non-proliferation treaty) or any comparable internationally binding commitment not to acquire nuclear explosive devices, except in the case of an attack on the United States, its territories or armed forces, or its allies, by such a State allied to a nuclear-weapon State or associated with a nuclear-weapon state in carrying out or sustaining the attack".

Sudan

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the British Government to curb human rights abuses in the Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We regularly take action, bilaterally, in concert with EU partners, and at the United Nationals, to press the Sudanese Government to improve their appalling human rights record. Earlier this month we co-sponsored a resolution abut the human rights situation in Sudan at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Goodlad: The cost of the FCO's expenditure in the United Kingdom on water and sewerage is as follows:

Year	*£*
1994–95 to date	[1]62,048
1993–94	[1]101,648
1992–93	162,614
1991–92	132,808

[1] Some accounts received by the FCO for 1993–94 and the current year are in dispute; when settled there will be some further costs to add.

It is not possible without disproportionate cost to identify overseas expenditure on water and sewerage for the Department's overseas accommodation.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the other four acknowledged nuclear weapons states *(a)* publicly provides figures for the numbers of nuclear weapons and warheads it deploys and *(b)* measures its nuclear capability in terms of explosive power rather than warhead numbers.

Mr. David Davis: In May 1994, President Mitterand gave figures for the numbers of French operational nuclear weapons and warheads. The US Government have released information on the total explosive yield of the US nuclear weapon stockpile. Neither Russia nor China has, to our knowledge, made official statements on the size of its stockpiles.

East Timor

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will support any proposal at the UN Security Council to set up a human rights monitoring team in East Timor.

Mr. Goodlad: No such proposal is before the UN Security Council. The human rights situation in East Timor is kept under regular review by the UN Commission on Human Rights. At its recent session, the UN commission welcomed the Indonesian Government's undertaking to invite the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit East Timor in 1995 and to continue to

co-operate with the UN commission's special rapporteurs and working groups.

Barings

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money has been lost by his Department and by the secret intelligence service arising out of developments at Barings.

Mr. Goodlad: There has been no financial loss by the FCO and the ODA arising out of developments at Barings. I do not intend to comment on detailed financial questions about the security and intelligence agencies.

China

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which way representatives of Her Majesty's Government voted at the United Nations meeting held in New York on the motion condemning the abuse of human rights in China; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The EU, with the support of a number of other countries, tabled a draft resolution on human rights in China at the 51st UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The United Kingdom voted in favour of the resolution, which narrowly failed to pass. Prior to this, the UK voted against a Chinese motion proposing that no action be taken on the draft resolution.

Rwanda

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the international community will take to bring to justice those responsible for the massacre against the people of Tutsi origin in Rwanda in the parish of Shangi.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UN Security Council resolution 955 of 8 November 1994 established an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda and investigators have begun work in the region. It will be for the prosecutor of the tribunal to decide who will be brought to trial.

In addition, the United Nations development programme has developed plans to help rehabilitate the Rwandan judicial system.

Sudanese Refugees

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the main causes of the current influx of refugees from southern Sudan into Uganda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The conflict in southern Sudan continues to displace Sudanese civilians to Uganda and other neighbouring countries. At the beginning of 1995, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated the number of Sudanese refugees in Uganda at 300,000.

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards a comprehensive test ban treaty which allows the conducting of hydro-nuclear explosions in a laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom remains committed to negotiating a comprehensive test ban treaty. We intend to abide by the terms of the treaty when it enters into force. At the same time, the United Kingdom, like the other nuclear weapon states, will need to take the necessary steps to fulfil our responsibility to ensure the safety and reliability of our nuclear weapons.

Turkey

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Turkish authorities over the seizure by Turkish customs officials in December 1993 of lorries owned by the haulage company, Ralph Davies International; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: Our embassy in Ankara have been in frequent contact with lawyers acting on behalf of Ralph Davies International and with the appropriate authorities in Turkey. We recently discovered that the court hearing had exceeded the 12-months period after which goods detained by Turkish customs can be sold. We therefore made representations to the Turkish Foreign Ministry on 25 January urging that any proposed sale of the vehicles be put on hold pending the outcome of legal representations.

Mr. Zia Farooqi

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the issue of a visa to Mr. Zia Farooqi, a leading member of the Pakistani Sunni organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: No representations have been received.

Gibraltar

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names and the dates when Ministers from his Department have visited Gibraltar during each of the last five years.

Mr. David Davis: During the period 1990–94, the following Ministers from this Department visited Gibraltar:

23–25 January 1990, right hon. Francis Maude MP, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

26–28 July 1991, right hon. Tristan Garel-Jones MP, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

30 November–1 December 1993, right hon. David Heathcoat-Amory MP, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for the current year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constituted.

Mr. Goodlad: There are no employees on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

The information requested at *(b)* is not readily available but will be provided to the hon. Member shortly.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Goodlad: We have no specific targets.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for the current year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Goodlad: We do not employ staff on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

It is not unusual for casual staff—that is, those employed on renewable monthly or quarterly contracts of less than 51 weeks duration—to be re-employed in the same or similar position following a short break.

It is not Foreign and Commonwealth Office policy to terminate contracts and re-appoint as a means of denying employment rights.

Information for the preceding five years is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what positions in *(i)* his Department and *(ii)* all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Goodlad: There are no positions filled by employees on temporary contracts of 51 weeks duration.

Positions filled by casual employees, that is, those employed on renewable monthly or quarterly contracts of less than 51 weeks duration include language teachers, escorting officers, library assistants, translators and interpreters, statisticians, technical archivists, scientific officers, professional advisers and some administrative and support grade posts.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Goodlad: The terms and conditions of employment vary according to the type of appointment. Model letters of appointment are available for viewing in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: We have not issued specific guidance in respect of recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees but follow the guidelines laid down by Her Majesty's Treasury.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Rents

13. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent for a council tenancy in England; and what were the equivalent figures for 1978–79 in actual and real terms.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The average weekly local authority rent in England in 1994–95 is estimated to be £35.68. In 1978–79, it was £5.90, which is £17.20 at today's prices using the gross domestic product deflator.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent for a council tenancy in England; and what were the equivalent figures for 1978–79 in actual and real terms.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 12 January, *Official Report*, column *173*.

Local Government Finance

21. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to set final capping limits for local authority spending.

Mr. Curry: We cannot take decisions on capping principles or on designation of individual authorities until after authorities have set their budgets and notified my Department by the end of this week. I expect to designate authorities under the capping procedures at the end of this month or early next.

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what amount was gained by *(a)* Bedfordshire and *(b)* Cambridgeshire through area cost adjustment over the last 10 years;

(2) what consideration he has given to reform of the area cost adjustment system for local government finance; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list the detailed criteria used in determining the area cost adjustment formula and the counties receiving it; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what was the financial effect of the area cost adjustment as between Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire in the current financial year.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The methodology that is used to calculate the area cost adjustment is set out in the departmental publication "Standard Spending Assessments: Guide to Methodology 1994–95 edition". A copy of this publication was placed in the Library. The main change introduced for 1995–96 is the replacement of judgmental factors in the calculation by detailed data from the new earnings survey.

We are currently considering with the local authority associations what programme of work should be undertaken on standard spending assessment methodology in 1995. We have indicated that we wish to consider the case for a change in the boundaries of zones used in the area cost adjustment and have commissioned research as a part of this work.

All London authorities, Isles of Scilly and Isle of Wight councils and authorities within the following counties currently receive area cost adjustments: Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex.

Cambridgeshire does not receive area cost adjustment. The other figures requested are:

a. In 1994–95 the county councils for Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire received the following contribution to their total standard spending assessment from area cost adjustment:
Bedfordshire: £22.830 million
Hertfordshire: £59.778 million
Oxfordshire: £21.320 million

b. Since 1990–91, the first year of standard spending assessments, Bedfordshire county council has received the following contribution to its total standard spending assessment from area cost adjustment:
1990–91: £9.777 million
1991–92: £13.302 million
1992–93: £16.505 million
1993–94: £20.263 million
1994–95: £22.830 million
1995–96: £17.456 million

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the accumulated financial reserves *(a)* of the London Borough of Ealing and *(b)* all other local authorities on 1 April 1994 and at the latest estimate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have placed the information in the Library of the House.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the purpose of designating local authorities for capping.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The twin purposes of capping are to ensure that all local authorities play their part in the restraint of public expenditure, and to protect council taxpayers from high council taxes.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to set final capping limits for local authorities.

Mr. Curry: We cannot take decisions on capping principles or on designation of individual authorities until after authorities have set their budgets. I expect to designate authorities under the capping procedures at the end of this month or early next.

House Repossessions

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of households likely to lose their home through repossession for mortgage arrears in the next 12 months.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government do not make predictions about future levels of repossessions, but I am pleased to note from the latest figures published by the Council of Mortgage Lenders that the number of properties taken into possession in 1994 was the lowest since 1990 and 35 per cent. lower than the peak in 1991.

Noisy Parties

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to curb noisy parties.

Mr. Atkins: Local authorities have powers to deal with noisy parties, but there are many who believe that controls on neighbour noise should be strengthened and we will very shortly be consulting on specific proposal to do this.

Special Protection Areas

29. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has to report on the designation of special protection areas for ornithological purposes and special areas for conservation for other wildlife conservation interests with respect to the European habitats directive.

Mr. Atkins: The Government are making excellent progress on classifying special protection areas for birds. Twenty-three SPAs have been classified in the last 12 months, bringing the UK total to 102. We expect to announce more classifications shortly. Following advice from the statutory nature conservation agencies, I will shortly be consulting on a list of possible areas which could qualify for submission to the European Commission as candidate special areas of conservation.

Negative Equity

30. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate of the number of households in negative equity.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Estimates of negative equity vary. Based on Department of the Environment house price data, in the fourth quarter of 1994 an estimated 677,440 households in the UK were affected by negative equity. This is over 40 per cent. lower than the peak in the fourth quarter of 1992.

Global Warming

31. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the most recent advice he has received on global warming; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The most recent, and most authoritative advice, is contained in the interim reports produced by the intergovernmental panel on climate change in 1992 and 1994. They confirm the IPCC's previous predictions of an underlying global warming rate of 0.3 deg C per decade during the next century due to greenhouse gas emissions from human activity.

Uniform Business Rate

32. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what submissions he has received regarding the uniform business rate for 1995–96; and what conclusions he has drawn from them.

Mr. Curry: I have received many representations on this issue. That is only to be expected, since there have been major changes in the market for rented property since the previous revaluation was carried out and rateable values have changed correspondingly. There would have been a great many more had we not taken steps to phase in the impact of the revaluation gently through a transitional scheme.

Standard Spending Assessments, Derbyshire

33. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received this year regarding the standard spending assessments for Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration met a delegation from Derbyshire county council on 3 January to discuss the impact of the 1995–96 local government settlement on the county. He also met a wider delegation from the east midlands counties, including Derbyshire, that day.

Lavatory Cisterns

34. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has considered the impact on the environment of different types of lavatory cisterns; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has commissioned research into the efficiency and effectiveness of various types of flushing mechanism and WCs which use lower volumes of water.

Council House Building

35. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes have been built by local councils in England over the past five years; and how this compares with the figures for the period 1974 to 1979.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It is estimated that local authorities completed 27,700 dwellings in the five years up the end of 1994. They completed 460,900 dwellings in the five years from the end of 1974 to the end of 1979.

Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing. Local authorities' primary housing tasks are the efficient management of their own stock of housing and enabling other organisations to provide new housing.

Councils (Political Publicity)

36. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines apply to councils devoting spending to propagating political arguments.

Mr. Gummer: Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 prohibits local authorities from producing party political publicity, and we have issued under section 4 of that Act a code of recommended practice on local authority publicity, a copy of which I have placed in the Library.

Homelessness

37. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce legislation to change the provisions of part III of the Housing Act 1985 in respect of homelessness.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 28 November 1994, *Official Report*, column 479.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total number of homes which have been developed on sites owned by the London Docklands development corporation, broken down by borough; how many of the homes in each borough have been for housing association development for rent and how many for shared ownership; what has been the total subsidy made by the London Docklands development corporation to social housing development in each borough in the urban development area in each year, since its inception, and what is the projected subsidy for the next three years; and what is the future role of the London Docklands development corporation in terms of social housing development.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is given in the tables:

By local authority	*Number*
Homes completed in the UDA	
Newham	4,639
Southwark	6,310
Tower Hamlets	6,511
Total	17,460
Housing association homes by tenure	
Rent	
Newham	1,618
Southwark	1,469
Tower Hamlets	922
Total	4,009
Shared Ownership	
Newham	229
Southwark	256
Tower Hamlets	225
Total	710

Total Social Housing Subsidy
(including refurbishment of Local Authority dwellings)
By Year and Local Authority
(projected to 1997–98)

£ million

	LBN	*LBTH*	*LBS*
1981–82	0.001	—	—
1982–83	0.062	—	0.328
1983–84	0.712	—	0.379
1984–85	0.305	—	—
1985–86	0.121	—	0.093
1986–87	0.489	0.068	1.137
1987–88	0.301	0.353	1.601
1988–89	2.764	0.028	4.746
1989–90	0.282	0.055	1.461
1990–91	20.726	10.880	4.885
1991–92	6.262	5.321	1.879
1992–93	2.264	5.411	0.556
1993–94	1.261	4.227	0.035
1994–95	0.011	2.847	0.600
1995–96	0.950	2.323	0.900
1996–97	1.500	0.037	—
1997–98	1.000	—	—
Totals	39.010	31.550	18.600

Note:
In addition, the LDDC spent £90 million to provide 568 socially rented dwellings for the Limehouse link rehousing scheme.

LDDC Strategy

The corporation's continuing strategy is to secure a range of new housing for all sections of the community.

Social housing packages currently planned in partnership with the Housing Corporation, local authorities, housing associations and developers include:

100 dwellings for rent, shared ownership and self-build on five sites in the Isle of Dogs

230 dwellings for rent as part of phase 1 of the west Silvertown urban village; 60 dwellings within phase 2.

Local Authority Mortgage Interest Rates

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Liverpool city council, when it sold its mortgages in 1985 and in 1992, was required to apply the Department's upper levels of statutory interest rates to mortgages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No. The statutory provisions governing local authority mortgage interest rates do not apply where a mortgage has been transferred to a commercial lender.

Westminster City Council

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the actions of Westminster city council and the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) during the transfer of Walterton and Elgin community homes under the provisions of the Housing Act 1988; and what plans he has to undertake any investigation or action as a result of these representations.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None.

Planning Permission

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what situations he expects local authorities to grant planning permission contrary to the major policies in their statutory plans.

Sir Paul Beresford: Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 states that where, in making any determination under the planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan, the determination shall be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Fire Safety

Mr Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many deaths there were in fires in houses in multiple occupation in each of the years 1990 to 1994; what proposals he has regarding certification of fire safety in houses of multiple occupation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Statistics are available for deaths from fire in England and Wales. The Home Office statistics do not correlate exactly with the definition of houses in multiple occupation in section 345 of the Housing Act 1985. The best estimate for multi-occupied houses, excluding shared houses—that is, by students or families taking in lodgers—is as follows:

Deaths from fire in England and Wales 1990–1993

Year	*Multiple occupancy houses*	*All hotels/ boarding houses*	*All hostels*	*Total*
1990	61	1	—	62
1991	44	3	1	48
1992	76	6	1	83
1993[1]	44	5	1	50

[1] Provisional. Figures for 1994 are not yet available.

The question of certification of fire safety in houses in multiple occupation was addressed by many of those responding to my Department's consultation paper on the case for licensing. The consultation period closed on 18 February and we are now considering what action to take. An announcement will be made in due course.

Housing

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment following the Court of Appeal decision in the case of Mitchell *v.* Secretary of State of 16 June 1994, what plans he has to issue fresh guidance to local authorities clarifying the extent to which, in the context of the provision of affordable housing, it is material in planning terms to distinguish between different types of tenure.

Mr. Gummer: The Mitchell judgment will be taken into account in the guidance to be issued shortly by the Department.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for the current year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Sir Paul Beresford: The following information covers non-industrial staff in my Department, excluding Ordnance Survey and PSA Services. All temporary staff are employed on contracts of less than 51 weeks.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
DOE	4.5	18	26	9	5	0
Agencies	3	2	6	15.5	18.5	0.5

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for the current year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Sir Paul Beresford: The following information covers non-industrial staff in my Department, excluding Ordnance Survey and PSA Services. All temporary staff are initially employed on contracts of less than 51 weeks.

	DoE		Agencies	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1 April 1990	178	3.5	30	3.6
1 April 1991	176	2.6	29.5	3.4
1 April 1992	254	4.0	57	3.4
1 April 1993	209.5	3.4	44.5	3.3
1 April 1994	304	6.5	42.5	3.3
1 March 1995	359.5	8.0	51	3.4

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible, on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Sir Paul Beresford: Departmental policy is only to employ staff on temporary contracts to meet the short-term needs of the Department. It is not possible therefore to forecast accurately the number we expect to employ in the future.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Sir Paul Beresford: In early 1994, my Department issued a circular to all its personnel sections, including those in its regions and agencies, giving guidance on the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent staff.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department has a standard letter of appointment for all temporary staff employed centrally in its regions and agencies. A copy has been placed in the library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Sir Paul Beresford: The following information covers non-industrial staff in my Department, excluding Ordnance Survey and PSA Services. All temporary staff are employed on contracts of less than 51 weeks.

Grade	DoE	Agencies
Grade 6	0.5	0.0
SEO and equivalent	2.5	1.5
HEO and equivalent	2.0	3.0
EO and equivalent	15.0	5.0
AO and equivalent	174.5	30.0
AA and equivalent	165.0	11.5

Water Investment

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of investment in the water industry in 1978–79; and what is the expected level in 1992–93 expressed in constant prices.

Sir Paul Beresford: On a comparable basis at constant prices, water industry capital expenditure in 1978–79 was about £1.1 billion. By 1992–93, it had almost trebled to some £3.2 billion.

Toy Libraries

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the grants to toy libraries in England in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

The relevant grants given by the Department of Health to the National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries, known as playmatters, are shown in the table.

£

Grants awarded	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Section 64 core grants	45,000	45,000	45,000	45,000	45,000
Section 64 project grants	Nil	10,000	10,000	10,000	Nil
Section 64 capital grant	Nil	Nil	Nil	10,371	Nil
Family Support Initiative	Nil	Nil	29,334	15,360	14,000
Small grants scheme	40,000	40,000	47,500	61,500	50,000
Total	85,000	95,000	131,834	142,231	109,000

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Care Disregard

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *53*, what has been the average award made to the recipients of the new child care disregard since its introduction; and what was the figure for those receiving maximum family credit and for those on the lowest level of family credit;

(2) how many claims have been made for the new child care disregard since its introduction in October; how many of these claims have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful; and if he will break these figures down according to people receiving (i) family credit, (ii) disability working allowance, (iii) housing benefit and (iv) council tax benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is available for family credit only. In the five-month period to 28 February 1995, the latest date for which information is available, there were 24,600 claims for help with child care charges. Of these, 12,900 families are now receiving higher family credit awards as a result of the new help. In 4,600 of these cases, the additional help increased their award to the maximum amount of family credit. The average additional weekly amount was £16.40.

Some 11,700 families claimed help with child care charges but did not receive it. Of these, 8,800 families were not eligible because they did not satisfy the qualifying conditions and 2,900 families received no extra help because they were already receiving the maximum

amount of family credit. Families with child care charges, including those who receive maximum family credit, may get extra help through housing benefit and council tax benefit. No information is yet available on the numbers who have obtained help through these benefits.

It will take some time before the new help takes full effect as existing family credit recipients can only claim the child care help when their current 26-week award expires, while many potential beneficiaries need to find work of 16 hours or more and to make appropriate child care arrangements.

Source:

Five per cent. sample of family credit awards made between 1 October 1994 and 28 February 1995. These figures do not include claims made by 28 February but decided after that date.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what the average award was made to family recipients of the new child care disregard since its introduction in October; and what was the figure for those receiving maximum family credit and for those on the lowest level of family credit;

(2) how many family credit recipients have claimed the new child care disregard since its introduction in October; and how many of these claims have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful.

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his answer, 10 January 1995, c.53]:* I regret that the information provided contained an error. The correct information is set out.

In the two-month period to 30 November 1994, there were 2,000 families who received additional help as a result of the new help with child care charges where the additional help increased their award to the maximum amount of family credit, and not 4,340 families as stated in the original answer.

Source:

Five per cent. sample of family credit awards made between 1 October 1994 and 30 November 1994. The figures do not include claims made by 30 November 1994 but decided after that date.

Funeral Payments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what regulations there are in respect of funeral payments under the social fund; and what information claimants must provide to funeral directors about their ability to pay funeral expenses.

Mr. Roger Evans: The relevant regulations are the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Regulations 1987, SI 481; the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1988, SI 36; the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1989, SI 379; the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1992, SI 2149; the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1993, SI 479, and the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1994, SI 506. There is no requirement therein for claimants or potential claimants to the social fund to provide the said information to funeral directors.

Benefits Payments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people residing in the parliamentary constituency of *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Eastwood are presently in receipt of social security payments; and what proportion this figure is of the population of the constituencies.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

As information is not available in respect of the total number in receipt of social security payments within the constituencies, it is not possible to provide this figure as a proportion of the population.

The available information, based on the relevant Benefits Agency districts, is in the table.

Benefit Customers at a given date

Benefit	*Date*	*Number of Customers*	
		Clyde Coast and Cowal	*Glasgow South West*
Sickness Benefit	31 January 1995	3,531	3,287
Invalidity Benefit	31 January 1995	7,465	10,282
Severe Disablement Allowance	31 January 1995	842	1,031
Maternity Allowance	31 January 1995	29	28
Income Support	30 November 1994	16,455	25,303
Family Credit	10 February 1995	1,946	1,828
Industrial Death Benefit	31 January 1995	71	94
Disability Working Allowance	17 February 1995	13	18

Invalidity Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Greenock and Port Glasgow Benefits Agency district; what proportion they represent of the total population of working age; and what are the average proportions for (i) the Strathclyde region and (ii) Scotland.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested.

The available information is in the tables.

Table A

	Number
People in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Clyde coast and Cowal district office area, which covers the Greenock district office and the Port Glasgow benefit office, on the last working day of January 1995.	7,465

Table A

	Number
People in receipt of invalidity benefit in the district offices that fall within the Strathclyde region on the last working day of January 1995.	152,950

Notes:

1. Figures obtained from a 100 per cent. clerical count of cases in the Benefits Agency offices.
2. The figure will include some people who have claimed but are not actually receiving invalidity benefit because they are in receipt of a higher overlapping benefit.
3. A few of the people quoted as being in the Strathclyde area are actually outside this area.

Table B

People in Scotland in receipt of invalidity benefit on 3 April 1993 by percentage of working population

	People in receipt of invalidity benefit	*Percentage of the working population*
Males	145,000	9
Females	70,000	5

Notes:

1. The working population has been taken to be 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women.
2. Invalidity benefit information based on a one per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Estimated mid-year population figures supplied by the population estimates unit, OPCS.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Hague: No such projections are available. Recruitment patterns will depend upon the circumstances applying at the time.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 week's duration.

Mr. Hague: The terms and conditions of service for temporary staff vary according to the type of temporary appointment, the expected length of the appointment, the agency or other business unit in which they are employed, the grade to which they are appointed, the type of work they are required to do and the location of the work. All temporary staff are, however, bound by the same general rules on matters such as conduct, standards of propriety, and political activities as apply to all civil servants and which are set out in the civil service management code, a copy of which is in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Hague: Guidance to managers on the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees is based on the rules set out in the civil service management code, a copy of which is in the Library.

Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what survey he has carried out into the extent to which Government Departments publish information in Braille or large type;

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that all Government Departments publish information in Braille or large type;

(3) what plans he has to improve access to information to blind and partially sighted people;

(4) if he will bring forward legislation requiring information, with special reference to Bills and public notices, to be sent to the blind and the partially sighted in the form of Braille or large print; and if he will ensure that the blind and partially sighted will be informed of their right to this information;

(5) how he plans to encourage other councils to follow the lead of councils, with special reference to Barnet, to promote services to the blind and partially sighted.

Mr. Hague: The Government recognise the importance of providing information in accessible formats. In the consultation document "Disability on the Agenda" we gave a commitment to seek to increase the range of information made available in this way. Departmental information officers are currently taking this work forward.

The Disability Discrimination Bill will provide a right of access for disabled people. Under that right, service providers, including local authorities, will be required to provide auxiliary aids and services where this is reasonable and necessary to enable disabled people, including those with visual impairments, to use the service in question. Where a service itself consists of either the provision of information of facilities for communication, that service must be accessible where reasonable. The Bill itself is available in Braille.

Benefits (Working People)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1989, the total amount of expenditure on (i) income support (ii) housing benefit and (iii) council tax benefit given to families containing one or more adults in work;

(2) if he will list, for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1989, how many families containing one or more adults in work received (i) income support, (ii) housing benefit and (iii) council tax benefit;

(3) if he will list for *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1991, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* 1989, the total amount of expenditure on (i) income support, (ii) housing benefit and (iii) council tax benefit given to people in work with no dependants;

(4) if he will list for *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1991, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* 1989, how many people in work with no dependants, received (i) income support, (ii) housing benefit and (iii) council tax benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the tables.

	IS	HB	CTB
1989			
Number of Families in work in receipt of:	112,000	—	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£278,000,000	—	—
Number of recipients in work without dependants in receipt of:	50,000	—	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£77,000,000	—	—
1990			
Number of families in work in receipt of:	107,000	182,000	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£295,000,000	£199,000,000	—
Number of recipients in work without dependants in receipt of:	46,000	142,000	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£76,000,000	£138,000,000	—
1991			
Number of families in work in receipt of:	121,000	192,000	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£373,000,000	£242,000,000	—
Number of recipients in work without dependants in receipt of:	43,000	138,000	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£75,000,000	£150,000,000	—
1992			
Number of families in work in receipt of:	133,000	223,000	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£458,000,000	£333,000,000	—
Number of recipients in work without dependants in receipt of:	64,000	146,000	—
Estimated expenditure on this group	£118,000,000	£191,000,000	—
1993			
Number of families in work in receipt of:	127,000	240,000	280,000
Estimated expenditure on this group	£481,000,000	£383,000,000	£79,000,000
Number of recipients in work without dependants in receipt of:	70,000	150,000	174,000
Estimated expenditure on this group	£146,000,000	£217,000,000	£47,000,000

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and expenditure to the nearest million.
2. For this analysis we have taken "recipients" to mean benefit units consisting of single people or couples with no dependants, and "families" to mean benefit units consisting of single people or couples with dependants.
3. For council tax benefit 1993 is the only year that figures have been provided. Prior to 1993 community charge benefit was in payment and figures for this are not comparable.
4. Estimated annual expenditure is calculated as benefit units multiplied by the average weekly amount of benefit in payment for the group, multiplied by 52.
5. IS and HB columns are not mutually exclusive and cannot therefore be summed.

Source:

Income support statistics annual inquiries May 1989 to May 1993 housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. samples May 1989 to May 1993.

Cold Weather Payments

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what entitlement constituents in Stoke-on-Trent, North have to cold weather payments in respect of *(a)* January and *(b)* February.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the cold weather payment scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Joan Walley, dated 14 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Cold Weather Payments.

Persons become entitled to a Cold Weather Payment if for any part of a period of cold weather they are entitled to Income Support which includes one of the following:

an amount for a dependent child under five or

a Pensioner, Higher Pensioner, Enhanced Pensioner, Disability, Severe Disability or Disabled Child Premium.

A period of cold weather is defined as a period of seven consecutive days when the average temperature in a local area is forecast or recorded to be 0°C or below.

Sixty meteorological weather stations in the UK are each linked to a set of postcodes. The Parliamentary constituency of Stoke-on-Trent North is in the area covered by the Benefits Agency District of North Staffordshire. The weather stations linked to postcodes in that district are Manchester Airport, Shawbury, Watnall and Wilsden. None of these weather stations returned forecast or recorded periods of cold weather in January or February and therefore no Cold Weather Payments were paid to people in that area during that period.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Social Fund

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the average, *(b)* the lowest and *(c)* the highest total payout made from the social fund by the Southampton benefits office in the most recent year.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. John Denham, dated 14 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Social Fund (SF) in Southampton.

Since the formation of the Benefits Agency (BA) in April 1991 all former DSS local offices were formed into Districts. The BA's Southampton office is now part of the BA District of Solent and New Forest, which comprises the offices of Southampton, Fareham and New Forest. Information is available only at District level.

I have provided at Annex A the average awards for Community Care Grants (CCG), Budgeting Loans (BLs), Crisis Loans (CLs), Funeral Payments and Maternity Payments made in the Solent and New Forest District in the year 1993–94. No Cold Weather Payments were made in the District during that year. I should add that Maternity payments can be made up to a maximum of £100, although in multiple pregnancies the £100 maximum can be made for each child. Therefore, the average Maternity Payments was slightly above £100.

Statistics showing the lowest or highest amounts awarded are not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. However, statistics are readily available showing the number of awards made within certain cash bands and at Annex B I have provided the number of awards within the lowest and highest cash bands for each part of the Fund in 1993–94.

The minimum amount that can be awarded for both CCGs and BLs is £30. There is no minimum award for CLs, therefore, the amount awarded will be enough to relieve the immediate emergency or disaster, after taking into account any income or capital the applicant has.

All SF loans are limited to the amount the individual applicant can afford to repay. The maximum amount of SF loans the individual applicant may have outstanding at any one time is £1,000. Therefore, no award can be made which, either singularly or when added to any outstanding amount, will exceed £1,000. There is no maximum amount rule for CCGs and this accounts for the different high and low cash bands.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A: Average award made in the Solent and New Forest District for community care grants, budgeting loans, crisis loans, funeral payments and maternity payments for the year April 1993—March 1994

Type	*Average award £*
Budgeting loan	229.99
Crisis loan	51.14
Community care grant	260.71
Funeral payment	792.82
Maternity payment	100.78

Annex B: The number of community care grant, budgeting loan, crisis loan, funeral payment and maternity payment awards made and the number of awards within the lowest and highest cash bands for Solent and New Forest district April 1993–March 1994

Type	*Up to £50*	*£901 to £1,000*	*Total awards*
Budgeting loan	409	26	7,403
Crisis loan	5,677	1	7,548

Type	*Up to £50*	*Above £1,000*	*Total awards*
Community care grant	345	48	1,908
Funeral payment	12	68	458

Type	*£51 to £100*	*£101 to £200*	*Total awards*
Maternity payment	2,063	17	2,080

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Professional Services

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the Overseas Development Administration spent on contracted external professional services in 1992–93 and 1993–94; what types of services were provided; and how much expenditure related to *(a)* the Overseas Development Administration's internal administration and *(b)* the aid programme.

Mr. Baldry: Total expenditure on contracted professional services for 1992–93 and 1993–94 was £204 million and £256 million, respectively. Less than 1 per cent. of this related to consultancy advice to assist our internal management of the aid programme. The remainder was aid programme expenditure relating to the provision of professional services to assist over 80 overseas Governments with the implementation of their development programmes. The services provided include conventional consultancy advice—about 25 per cent. of the total—and project and programme management services provided by external private and public sector organisations such as the British Council.

St. Helena

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy for encouraging entrepreneurial endeavour on St. Helena.

Mr. Baldry: We recognise the importance of encouraging entrepreneurial endeavour on St. Helena, as an essential means of promoting the island's economic prospects, and we are making a substantial commitment to that goal.

Under a three-year project about to be finalised in agreement with the Government of St. Helena, the Overseas Development Administration will be providing some £1.2 million of aid to support the establishment of a new business development organisation for the island, the St. Helena development agency. The aim of the agency is to encourage an export-oriented and import-substituting private sector, reducing the trade deficit and dependence on UK budgetary aid. Its purpose is to promote sustainable private sector development by providing a viable alternative to aid-financed public sector employment in St. Helena. Activities will include the training of private sector staff, the provision of business advisory services and the provision of grants for private sector projects where justified on development grounds.

Iraq

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking within the framework of humanitarian support to restore the economy of areas of Iraq not under the control of the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Baldry: In the three northern governorates of Iraq, we have this financial year contributed £2 million to help returning villagers become self-sustaining and £1 million to help protect wheat crops from pests. We are also contributing to a programme of clearing land mines from agricultural areas and villages.

TREASURY

Barings Bank

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if Barings bank breached the Banking Act 1987 over transfer of its capital to Singapore;

(2) if Barings bank received permission from the Bank of England to place more than 25 per cent. of its capital in Singapore.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what date the issues raised at the board meeting of Barings in September 1994 were first communicated to the Bank of England;

(2) what communications were received by the Bank of England as to developing problems at either Barings in the United Kingdom or Singapore from overseas financial authorities in each of the last 24 months;

(3) when the Bank of England was first made aware of the Barings internal audit report outlining concerns over the activities of Mr. Nick Leeson.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answers 8 and 13 March 1995]:* As my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 27 February, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date Ministers were first informed that Barings was unable to meet its financial commitments.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* On 24 February 1995.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he *(a)* has given and *(b)* will give directions under section 4 of the Bank of England Act 1946 to the governor of the Bank of England to appear as a witness in inquiries into the Barings bank collapse.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the Bank of England was first informed of the previous experience of Barings in establishing banking structures prior to March 1992 where problems arose as referred to in the BAX Memo;

(2) on what date the problems of Barings in Japanese markets in 1990 were first drawn to the attention of the Bank of England;

(3) on what date reassurances given by Mr. Anthony Hawes, Treasurer of Baring Securities to SIMEX on 8 February as to the ability of Barings to meet its financial commitments were made known to representatives of the Bank of England.

Mr. Nelson: As my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 27 February, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Sterling

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to reduce sterling to a competitive level against *(a)* the dollar and *(b)* the deutschmark.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The Government do not set targets for the exchange rate. Movements in the exchange rate are considered as part of general assessment of monetary conditions in setting monetary policy. United Kingdom firms are very competitive, as shown by our strong export performance; in the fourth quarter of 1994 export volumes, excluding oil and erratics, were up up 13½ per cent. on a year earlier.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to reduce sterling to a competitive level against the ecu currencies other than the deutschmark; and if he will publish a table showing the sterling exchange rate for ecu currencies other than the deutschmark for each month from August 1992.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The Government do not set targets for the exchange rate. Movements in the exchange rate are considered as part of general assessment of monetary conditions in setting monetary policy. United Kingdom firms are very competitive, as shown by our strong export performance; in the fourth quarter of 1994 export volumes, excluding oil and erratics, were up 13½ per cent. on a year earlier. Sterling's exchange rate against the ecu currencies can be found in table 7.1A of "Financial Statistics" published by the Central Statistical Office.

Construction Workers

Mr. Berry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his estimates for *(a)* the numbers of individuals working in the construction industry on the basis of SC60 certificates and *(b)* the numbers of individuals operating with 714Is, in each year following the scrutineering exercise in 1990.

Sir George Young: The number of 714I holders, recorded in April of each year—March for 1995—were as follows:

1990: 513,145
1991: 508,710
1992: 485,668
1993: 450,107
1994: 424,185
1995: 414,040

Numbers of individuals taxed on the basis of SC60 deduction are not compiled. But the Inland Revenue believes that, for each of the above years, the numbers have been lower than for 714I holders.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the Inland Revenue estimates for change in *(a)* relative numbers of 714s, SC60s and PAYE individuals in the constructions industry and *(b)* the respective tax yield of each category as a consequence of the measures related to thresholds for eligibility for 714 certificates introduced in the Finance Bill 1995.

Sir George Young: No firm estimates have been made. But the purpose of the Finance Bill measures is to reduce the number of 714 certificates in use, so that at least 80 per cent. of subcontractors—mostly those who supply only their own labour—are paid under SC60 deduction. An indirect consequence of the changes may be an increase in the number of individuals in the industry who are directly employed, and therefore taxed under PAYE, but it is impossible to predict the extent of this movement. The overall tax yield from the industry is expected to

increase significantly by limiting the scope for evasion and non-payment of tax.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of three previous years.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury's expenditure on water and sewerage in the current year and each of the three previous years is as follows:

Year	£
1994–95[1]	43,392
1993–94	13,677
1992–93	25,037
1991–92	24,790

[1] Expenditure to 10 March 1995.

Debt Relief

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the outcome of the recent Paris Club meeting with regard to the debts of Guinea, Togo, Uganda, Chad and Guinea-Bissau; and what is the schedule for further debt relief for other countries.

Mr. Nelson: Since the December Paris Club agreement to offer greater debt relief under the full Trinidad terms, Chad, Togo and Guinea-Bissau have been offered maturities treatment with 67 per cent. debt reduction. Guinea has received maturities treatment with 50 per cent. debt reduction. Uganda was offered a debt stock reduction at 67 per cent.

The Paris Club meets monthly to discuss debt relief for countries on a case-by-case basis.

Disabled People (VAT)

Mr. Keen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the benefits which would accrue from making all special equipment for the disabled VAT exempt on proof of disabled registry.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A wide range of goods and services are already zero-rated when supplied to people with disabilities. This includes special equipment designed solely for use by people with disabilities. These reliefs save people with disabilities about £150 million in VAT each year.

Electricity Prices

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Treasury was first told of Professor Littlechild's intention to review electricity price caps, as announced on Tuesday 7 March.

Sir George Young: The Treasury was first told during the afternoon of Monday 6 March that Professor Littlechild had just decided to review further the electricity distribution price caps on the regional electricity companies.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Professor Littlechild or his office first informed the Treasury that the Director General of Electricity Supply was considering a new review of electricity price caps.

Sir George Young: Neither Professor Littlechild nor his office directly informed the Treasury that the Director General of Electricity Supply was considering a new review of electricity price caps. The information initially available to the Treasury came via the DTI.

WALES

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what formal representations he has received from the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the funding of the council from 1 April 1995.

Mr. Redwood: I held a meeting with the chairman on 10 January and with him and the full council on 24 January. These meetings, and letters exchanged between me and the chairman, covered a wide range of issues including future funding of the Countryside Council for Wales.

Languages

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many teachers are teaching English as a second language in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each of the eight Welsh counties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Child Abuse

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *766*, on what date his Department received copies from other Departments, the Prime Minister's Office and the local government ombudsman of allegations concerning widespread child sexual and physical abuse at north Wales children's homes which were made by a child care officer to the Prime Minister on 17 January 1987, to the Secretary of State for Health dated 29 January 1988, and to the local government ombudsman in late 1986.

Mr. Redwood: The correspondence referred to by the hon. Member concerned allegations of physical abuse at a specific children's home in Gwynedd. It was not until June 1991 that this correspondent made allegations of widespread sexual abuse in children's homes in north Wales. These were already the subject of investigation by the North Wales police.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *25*, regarding a grant for Crickhowell house, what conditions were applied to the grant in respect of *(a)* the level of employment in Crickhowell house, *(b)* the completion of the building to suitable standards of resistance to wind and weather and *(c)* repayment in whole or in part when the conditions (i) and (ii) are not being met in whole or in part; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This is an operational matter and I have asked the chief executive of the corporation to respond.

Wales European Centre

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the future provision of funding towards the cost of the Wales European centre in Brussels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The chairman has raised the issue of WDA support for the centre and I have told him it is a matter for the agency to decide within its budget and Welsh Office guidelines for expenditure.

Prescription Pricing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he has made in the market testing of the prescription pricing service of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority for the administration of prescriptions dispensed through the medium of Welsh.

Mr. Redwood: The British national formulary advises that the professional communication between prescriber and dispenser should be in English. However, I would expect the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to include, in its specification for the market testing of prescription pricing services, a reference to the possibility that some prescriptions might contain an element of Welsh.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Redwood: No staff in my Department or executive agencies have been employed on contracts of 51 weeks. The numbers of temporary staff employed on contracts of less than 51 weeks and then re-employed in each of the last five years was as follows:

(i) *Department*

1990: 0
1991: 13
1992: 15
1993: 72
1994: 63
1995: 0

(ii) *Executive Agencies*

1990: 1
1991: 8
1992: 18
1993: 16
1994: 19
1995: 2

The figures include staff employed seasonally. The years relate to the date of re-employment.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which is he responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Redwood: The number of employees in my Department, including Cadw, that will be employed or re-employed on temporary contracts over the next three years is not determined. It will depend on operational requirements.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Redwood: Guidance on the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees is contained in the Welsh Office terms and conditions code which is available to all staff.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Mr. Redwood: These figures are:

51 weeks: none.

less than 51 weeks:

Year	*Welsh Office*		*Cadw*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
1990	122	5.1	[1]—	—
1991	71	3.0	[1]—	—
1992	125	5.0	[2]—	—
1993	140.5	5.5	3	1.1
1994	239	9.1	9	4.0
1995	221	8.8	7.5	3.3

Notes:

[1] Cadw became an agency on 1 April 1992.

[2] Separate figure not available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Redwood: No staff in my Department or executive agencies have been employed on contracts of 51 weeks. Staff employed on temporary contracts of less than 51 weeks are in the following positions:

In my Department: administrative assistant; administrative officer; typist; executive officer; higher executive officer; support grades bands I and II; statistician; legal officer; quality surveyor; and assistant information officer.

In the executive agencies: administrative assistant; support grade band I; typist; museum support grade.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the full terms of employment specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Redwood: A copy of the standard appointment documents issued to temporary staff has been placed in the Library of the House.

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total cost of the market-testing exercise on the cardiac surgery unit for Morriston NHS hospital.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* All proposals for capital developments require the submission of business cases whether market testing is involved or not. Business cases vary according to the particular development proposed and the opportunities for involving public and private sector partners. The cost of producing the business case for the cardiac unit at Morriston hospital was around £287,000, which was met in full by the Welsh Office in view of the distinctive nature of the development. In the case of the Morriston cardiac unit, market testing produced innovative proposals which I hope will lead to a high-quality and cost-effective solution.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Harbour Grants

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what grants have been given from European sources in each financial year since 1973 in respect of *(a)* Larne Harbour Ltd., *(b)* Belfast habour board and *(c)* Warrenpoint harbour board.

Mr. Moss: Details of grant paid prior to 1984 no longer exist. Those for 1984–85 and 1985–86 are incomplete, but available details are set out below together with details of grants paid in each financial year from 1986–87 to 1994–95.

	Larne £	*Belfast* £	*Warrenpoint* £
1984–85	—	193,838.66	—
1985–86	—	1,000,000.00	350,000.00
1986–87	97,633.00	1,457,920.08	385,102.00
1987–88	560,750.00	325,362.70	44,465.00
1988–89	374,981.08	3,301,363.00	131,727.50
1989–90	340,867.50	1,791,802.11	467,823.10
1990–91	340,408.19	4,447,219.26	257,655.75
1991–92	215,649.34	9,597,176.84	498,068.25
1992–93	735,807.24	5,354,312.58	322,338.00
1993–94	2,582,036.41	21,554,017.10	3,883,668.00
1994–95	782,831.83	6,219,782.17	441,363.00
Total	6,030,964.59	55,242,794.50	6,782,210.60

Anthrax

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of anthrax were reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: There have been two cases of anthrax in Northern Ireland since 1985—one animal reported in 1986 and one in 1990.

Hospitals Review

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evidence the McKenna review has taken on the future provision of services in the Greater Belfast area from clinicians of hospitals likely to be affected by the outcome of the review; who else has been consulted; and when the review is expected to report.

Mr. Moss: The McKenna review is primarily concerned with services provided by the Royal Group of Hospitals trust and the Belfast City Hospital trust. Clinicians from both these trusts are leading the reviews of their specialities and will be making their recommendations to the review group. Dr. McKenna has undertaken to consult other trusts whose services may be affected by any of the recommendations made by the group. The group has recently consulted the public on its proposals for the broad direction of services for both trusts, called "In Shape for the Future". The response was generally favourable. The review is expected to take up to two years to complete, but there is likely to be a number of reports during that period.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Moss: The cost of water and sewerage is not distinguished on the rates bills in Northern Ireland and it would be possible to provide an answer only at disproportionate cost.

Braidside Integrated Primary School

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he plans to take concerning discrimination contained in an advertisement for a religious education teacher in Braidside integrated primary school.

Mr. Ancram: None. Teaching is an excepted employment under section 37 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976.

Languages

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teachers in Northern Ireland are teaching English as a second language in public sector schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Sir John Wheeler: The Department of Finance and Personnel had issued guidance to all Northern Ireland Departments and agencies in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees to the Northern Ireland civil service, covering entry requirements in relation to age, nationality, health, character, knowledge and ability; procedures for vetting; and the implementation of the policy of selection on merit in fair and open competition.

Recruitment to the home civil service in the Northern Ireland Office is subject to the provisions of the Civil Service Order in Council 1991, under which staff whose employment will not exceed 12 months, are exempt from selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. No specific guidance is produced for such appointments, subject to checks as appropriate in relation to age, education, nationality, health and character.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration

Sir John Wheeler: Employees on temporary contracts are not generally offered employment for a specific period but are retained for as long as required, which in most cases is for 51 weeks. The posts concerned are as follows:

(a) 51 weeks	*(b) Less than 51 weeks*
NI Departments and the NI Office	
Casual Veterinary Officer	[1]Industrial Forest Worker
Casual Assistant Accommodation Manager	[1]Industrial Farm Worker
Casual Typist	
Sandwich Course Student	
Casual Brucella Tester	
Casual Administrative Assistant	Vacation Student
Casual Fisheries Officer II	
Casual Assistant Scientific Officer	
Support Grade 2	
Casual Imports Inspector	
Casual Assistant Librarian	
Casual Food Technologist	
Telephonist	
Computer Programme Administrative Officer	
Casual Scientific Officer	
Grade IV Short Term Relief Environment Service	
Legal Assistant	
Agencies	
Administrative Assistant	
Administrative Officer	
Instructional Officer 1	
Support Grade 2	
Telephonist	
Security Guard	

[1] (Contract for maximum of 12 weeks).

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Sir John Wheeler: The information has been placed in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Sir John Wheeler: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office, including agencies, employ staff on temporary contracts of up to 51 weeks in order to alleviate the difficulties caused by staff shortages through periods of maternity leave, special leave, long-term illness and special exercises which may arise periodically.

It is not therefore possible to estimate reliable figures of staff who will be employed on such temporary contracts in the next three years.

EDUCATION

University Admissions

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the proportion of pupils from state schools in the total intake of Oxford and Cambridge universities in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1993 (i) in total, (ii) excluding pupils from selective grammar schools in the state sector and (iii) excluding pupils from selective grammar schools in the state sector and grant maintained schools were applicable.

Mr. Boswell: Detailed information on admissions to individual universities is not collected centrally. It is for each university to decide its own criteria for the admission of students. I understand that the admissions offices of both universities do produce annual statistics along these lines and my hon. Friend might care to speak to them directly.

English Language Teachers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many teachers in England are teaching English as a second language in public sector schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1992, the most recent date for which figures are available, there were approximately 900 teachers in maintained secondary schools in England who had timetabled teaching assignments in English as a second language. No figures are available for the number of teachers involved in teaching English as a second language outside the usual timetable or in primary schools.

College Funding

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what regulations apply to further education councils in respect of the funding of colleges.

Mr. Boswell: Under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the Further Education Funding Council for England has a duty to secure the provision for the population of its area of sufficient facilities for the full-time further education of 16-to-18 year olds. It also has a statutory duty to secure the provision of adequate facilities for part-time further education of those over 16, and full-time further education of those over 18, and to have regard to the requirements of persons with learning difficulties.

Under the Act, the council may give financial support to the governing body of any institution within the further education sector in respect of the provision of facilities for further education. The Secretary of State may make grants to the council subject to such terms and conditions as she may determine.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what procedure is set down for colleges when trying to appeal against a decision of the Further Education Funding Council;

(2) what criteria the Further Education Funding Council follows in deciding the amount of funding for each college;

(3) what is the average percentage, per pupil, of funding given to colleges in the West Midlands area;

(4) if the Further Education Funding Council takes into account inflation, *(a)* for the college itself and *(b)* in respect of its effect on the parents, students and local community when deciding what percentage of the cost of study to fund.

Mr. Boswell: Details of the allocation of funding to colleges are matters for the Further Education Funding Council. I am therefore asking the council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many employees in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by her Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constituted.

Mr. Boswell: The number of full-time equivalent staff employed on temporary contracts covering periods up to 12 months was:

	DFE	*Per cent. of total*	*TPA*	*Per cent. of total*
1989–1990	41	1.6	—	—
1990–1991	29	1.1	—	—
1991–1992	32	1.2	—	—
1992–1993	80	3.3	6	2.0
1993–1994	71	3.9	10	3.1
1994–1995	85	4.8	17	5.0

The Teachers' Pensions Agency was established on 1 April 1992.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by her Department.

Mr. Boswell: Recruitment and appointment to the Department and to the Teachers' Pensions Agency follows the principal recruitment rules set out in the civil service management code and in the Civil Service Order in Council.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what positions in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which her Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Boswell: The number of full-time equivalent staff currently employed on temporary contracts covering periods up to 12 months by grade are:

	DFE	TPA
Grade 7	0	0
HEO and equivalent	1	0
EO and equivalent	7	0
AO and equivalent	23	0
AA and equivalent	34	13
Total	65	13

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in her Department and all executive agencies for which she is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member, sending her a copy of the Department's standard letter of appointment and schedule for casual staff.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which her Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar positions at a later date.

Mr. Boswell: The full information is not available. However, of the current temporary employees on contracts covering periods up to 12 months, six have been previously employed on temporary contracts.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State, how many people she expects to employ in (i) her Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which she is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Boswell: The estimated number of full-time equivalent staff expected to be employed over the next three years on temporary contracts covering periods up to 12 months are:

	DFE	*TPA*
1995–1996	18	10
1996–1997	18	10
1997–1998	18	10

It is not possible to predict the number of employees likely to be re-employed.

Schools Funding

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the aggregate special purposes grant—VAT—paid to grant-maintained schools for each of *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94 and *(d)* 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is now held by the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will place in the Library a copy of the independent consultants' study into grant-maintained school spending on VAT made to inform her Department on the level of grant for 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: No. It would not be normal practice to publish reports commissioned to advise Ministers and Government.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the cost of her Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Boswell: The total expenditure incurred by this Department in respect of water and sewerage to date in the current financial year and in each of the previous three financial years is:

Year	£
1991–92	42,376
1992–93	67,759
1993–94	44,750
1994–95	42,922

The figure for 1992–93 includes increased costs incurred pending the consolidation of London-based staff into a single headquarters building.

Student Grants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to ensure that students grants meet the minimum social security income support threshold; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The resources available through the grant and loan are adequate for most students. The total resources available in grant and loan are now almost 50 per cent. higher in cash terms and 19 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1989–90, before loans were introduced. Resources will be increased by a further 2.5 per cent. for the 1995–96 academic year.

Income support and housing benefit continue to be available to students in certain groups. The access funds, which will once again be increased for 1995–96, can provide additional assistance to full-time students in particular need.

Chess

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what administrative procedures are involved in the transfer of responsibility for chess from her Department to the Department of National Heritage;

(2) what is the chess budget in her Department;

(3) how many civil servants are responsible for chess in her Department.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has no policy responsibility for chess. However the Department has for some years given grant to the British Chess Federation towards the cost of its activities, in acknowledgement of the game's perceived educational benefits. For the financial year 1995–96, the Department has offered the British Chess Federation grant of up to £48,500. An estimated 50 hours of official time per annum is spent on matters relating to the payment of grant to the British Chess Federation.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what position in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Horam: Employees on temporary contracts, regardless of duration, are used only where there is a genuine management need to employ people for a short period rather than to make a permanent appointment. These types of appointment are concentrated in the more junior administrative grades or secretarial staff.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Horam: In my Department and in the executive agencies, we adopt a policy of staffing on a permanent basis to deal with expected levels of work, and using temporary contracts to cope with unexpected peaks of activity. It is not possible therefore to give meaningful predictions of temporary staffing levels in future years.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks'

duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Horam: (i) The Department and agencies for which I am responsible did not exist in any comparable form before the 1992 election, so figures for earlier years are therefore not available. The figures since 1992 for my Department are:

51 Weeks

1992: 4
1993: 4
1994: 4
1995: 4

Less than 51 Weeks

1992: 7
1993: 8
1994: 5
1995: 1

(ii) The figures since 1992 for the agencies are as follows:

Civil Service College

There were no employees on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

For those on contracts of less than 51 weeks, the figures are as follows:

1992: 0
1993: 4
1994: 6
1995: 1

OHS

There were no employees re-employed on contracts of either up to or exactly 51 weeks.

RAS

There were no employees re-employed on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

For those on contracts of less than 51 weeks, the figures are as follows:

1992: 10
1993: 4
1994: 2
1995: 0

Chessington Computer Centre

There were no employees re-employed on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

For those on contracts of less than 51 weeks, the figures are as follows:

1992: 2
1993: 0
1994: 0
1995: 0

COI

There were no employees on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

For those on contracts of less than 51 weeks, the figures are as follows:

1992: 18
1993: 11
1994: 2
1995: 0

HMSO

There were no employees re-employed on temporary contracts of either up to or exactly 51 weeks.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constituted.

Mr. Horam: (i) The Department and agencies for which I am responsible did not exist in any comparable form before the 1992 election, so figures for earlier years are therefore not available. The figures for my Department since 1992 are:

Year	Total	Percentage
51 weeks		
1992	4	0.30
1993	4	0.30
1994	4	0.30
1995	4	0.30
Less than 51 weeks		
1992	17	1.25
1993	43	3.33
1994	54	4.10
1995	7	0.50

(iii) The figures for the agencies since 1992 are as follows:

Civil Service College[1]

Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
Less than 51 weeks		
1992	6.0	2.60
1993	7.0	2.90
1994	7.0	2.75
1995	14.5	5.65

[1] There were no employees on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

OHS[1]

Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
Less than 51 weeks		
1992	2	1.60
1993	4	3.40
1994	0	0
1995	1	0.93

[1] There were no employees on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

RAS[1]

Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
Less than 51 weeks		
1992	19	10
1993	15	10
1994	11	8
1995	5	4

[1] In 1994 there was one person employed on a temporary contract of 51 weeks (0.1 per cent.) and there were none for the remaining years.

Chessington Computer Centre

Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
51 weeks		
1992	2	0.4
1993	0	0
1994	2	0.5
1995	0	0

Chessington Computer Centre

Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
Less than 51 weeks		
1992	5	1.0
1993	2	0.4
1994	1	0.2
1995	2	0.5

COI[1]

Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
Less than 51 weeks		
1992	71	10.3
1993	49	8.3
1994	35	6.6
1995	0	0

[1] There were no employees on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

HMSO

Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
51 weeks		
1992	1	0.06
1993	1	0.06
1994	1	0.05
1995	0	0
Less than 51 weeks		
1992	38	0.58
1993	27	0.40
1994	70	2.0
1995	0	0

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what evidence he has that Government Departments or executive agencies supervised by Government Departments are abusing the extension of temporary contracts of 51 weeks or less in duration in the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees.

Mr. Horam: In the course of their 1993–94 programme of monitoring of a sample of departmental and agency recruitment, the civil service commissioners found a number of instances where temporary staff appointed without fair and open competition were retained beyond 12 months without there being any demonstrable exceptional circumstance as required by the Civil Service Order in Council 1991. These instances were not widespread and, following a reminder of the rules from the commissioners, the pattern has not been repeated in 1994–95.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Horam: The majority of staff on temporary contracts are issued with a standard letter of appointment. It is too long to be reproduced here and I shall be writing to the hon. Member separately enclosing a copy.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Horam: My Department and the executive agencies follow the rules set out in the civil service management code for the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees. A copy of the code can be found in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Sheltered Employment

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessement his Department intends to make of the impact of special contracts arrangements upon sheltered employment workshops.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Service will consider the operation of the scheme annually.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what body will be responsbile for the inspection of, and standards set in, workplaces which apply to become extended sheltered employers; and how such a body will be constituted and resourced.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Service's supported employment programme provides jobs for around 21,000 severely disabled people through contracts held with Remploy, local authorities and voluntary bodies.

The ES's supported employment procurement and consultancy service is responsbile for all contracts for supported employment apart from Remploy which is directly answerable to the chief executive of the ES. The contracts specify standards and SEPACS monitors contractors' compliance with these.

The proposal in the Disability Discrimination Bill to extend the Government's powers to allow direct funding of supported employment in dividend distributing bodies will only be used after consultation with relevant organisations.

Remploy

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been his contribution to Remploy in cash and constant price terms in each of the past 10 years; and what is the projected budget for Remploy for 1995–96.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's contributions to Remploy since 1984–85 are set out in the follwing table in cash and in 1993–94 constant prices:

Year	*Cash prices £000s*
1984–85	56,570
1985–86	59,290
1986–87	57,144
1987–88	57,996
1988–89	62,714
1989–90	67,013
1990–91	72,167
1991–92	75,346
1992–93	83,995
1993–94	89,199
1994–95	92,082
1995–96	94,161

Year	1993-94 constant prices
1984–85	88,568
1985–86	87,640
1986–87	81,845
1987–88	79,888
1988–89	81,499
1989–90	80,777
1990–91	79,309
1991–92	79,052
1992–93	85,429
1993–94	89,199
1994–95	—
1995–96	—

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the net cost of each Remploy employee to the state after allowing for benefits unclaimed and taxes and insurance contributions unpaid.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available. In the 1993–94 financial year, Remploy employed an average of 8,654 people with severe disabilities at an operating deficit of £9,727 per severely disabled worker.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from Remploy about the consequences of Government policies for it employees.

Miss Widdecombe: The chairman and chief executive of Remploy meet Employment Department Ministers and the chief executive of the Employment Service at regular intervals to discuss Remploy's performance. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss a wide range of topics, including relevant Government policies.

Training

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new businesses have been established and supported by training and enterprise councils in Northumberland, Tyneside, Sunderland, County Durham and Teesside since 1988; and what is the total number of jobs created.

Mr. Paice: The numbers of new businesses helped under the enterprise allowance scheme and business start-up scheme since the start of the 1990–91 financial year to the end of January 1995 are shown in the following table.

TEC	Total number of starts
County Durham	2,801
Northumberland	1,207
Sunderland City	1,100
Teesside	2,886
Tyneside	3,017

The first training and enterprise councils were set up in April 1990 and so figures for earlier years are not available.

National participant survey exercises conducted in the TEC era, found that, on average, approximately 0.3 additional jobs were created per business start-up scheme entrant. Local figures are not available.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimated value in turnover added to local economies in respect of new businesses and the impact on economic generation of new businesses established and supported by TECs in each year since 1989.

Mr. Paice: Start-ups in England under the enterprise allowance scheme—known as the business start-up scheme from 1991–92—since the introduction of training and enterprise councils are shown in the following table:

1990–91:—59,300
1991–92:—41,800
1992–93:—33,600
1993–94:—34,500

Business start-up scheme participant surveys provide some information on the average investment in, and income from, these businesses but it is not possible to quantify the value in turnover added or the overall impact on the various local economies.

This scheme has been the main, but not the only, source of TEC support to new businesses. TECs also provide assistance under contract to the Department of Trade and Industry and from their own resources.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to separate the costs of water from sewerage because the cost of water and sewerage for some buildings are part of service charges paid to landlords, which do not show these items separately. However, the following table shows the overall expenditure on water utilities for each financial year since 1991–92:

Expenditure on Water
Includes Sewerage and "Metered" Water Supplies

Year	£
1994–95 (spend to date)[1]	1,224,950
1993–94	1,895,103
1992–93	1,789,079
1991–92	2,078,444

[1] End February 1995.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs are reserved in his Department for people with disabilities; and what checks exist to ensure that such quotas are adhered to.

Miss Widdecombe: No jobs in the Employment Department group are reserved for disabled people but across the group as a whole, people with disabilities comprise 3.9 per cent. of the work force.

Workstart

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of Employment what is the total cost of Workstart and the total saving from Workstart to date *(a)* in east Kent and *(b)* in South London; how many people have been involved to date; and what overall saving per person has been achieved.

Miss Widdecombe: Savings to the Exchequer from any employment programme arise from long-term improvements in the functioning of the labour market, and cannot be calculated in the terms requested.

Under the Workstart pilots, which ran from July 1993 to December 1994, employers who recruited long-term unemployed people were paid £60 a week for the first six months, and £30 a week for the next six. It is not possible to provide costs for each of the pilot areas. The total expenditure for the east Kent, London and Devon and Cornwall pilot areas until the end of February 1995 was £1,586,519.

A total of 468 people have participated in the east Kent pilot and 238 people in London.

Evaluation of Workstart suggested that it has had a positive effect on employers' willingness to recruit long-term unemployed people, and this approach will be explored further using the 5,000 pilot places announced in the Budget.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) the Employment Service.

Miss Widdecombe: Guidance throughout the Employment Department group gives effect to the rules in the civil service management code which are governed by the Civil Service Order in Council 1991.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) the Employment Service on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information relates to plans for the number of casual staff years. The plans are shown in the following table:

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Employment Service	1,652	1,317	1,202
Rest of Employment Department Group[1]	297	285	285

[1] Employment Department, Health and Safety Executive and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) the Employment Service have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration for the current year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constitute.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information about casual staff, with the percentage of the respective workforce in brackets is shown in the following table.

Staff Years—Outturn

	1990–91	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[2]
Employment Service	1,762 (4.9)	3,750 (8.8)	3,394 (7.1)	3,382 (8.0)	2,428 (5.0)
Rest of Employment Department Group[1]	715 (4.3)	378 (2.5)	592 (4.0)	621 (4.9)	661 (6.0)

[1] Employment Department, Health and Safety Executive and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.
[2] Estimated Outturn.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for the current year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) the Employment Service who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each Employment Service office (i) the number of employees employed on temporary (ii) 51 week contracts, (iii) the number of employees employed on temporary contracts of less than 51 weeks duration and (iv) the total number of employees for the current year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying how many employees in (i) have been previously employed on a temporary 51 week contract by the Employment Service.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 15 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of employees employed on temporary contracts by the Employment Service (ES).

All ES temporary employees are currently given contracts for a specific number of weeks of employment up to a maximum of 51 weeks. Detailed information about the length of each individual contract, or personal records on individual employees who have been previously employed on temporary contracts, is not recorded. It is not therefore possible to provide the numbers of employees in the different categories requested for each ES office except at disproportionate cost.

I can however provide staff usage figures (including those on temporary contracts) for the past five years.

All employees (including temporary employees)

April 1989 to April 1990	*April 1990 to April 1991*	*April 1991 to April 1992*	*April 1992 to April 1993*	*April 1993 to April 1994*	*Estimated for 12 months to April 1995*
36,445	35,639	42,564	47,763	48,282	44,923

Temporary employees

April 1989 to April 1990	*April 1990 to April 1991*	*April 1991 to April 1992*	*April 1992 to April 1993*	*April 1993 to April 1994*	*Estimated for 12 months to April 1995*
1,803	1,762	3,750	3,394	3,882	2,428

I hope this information is helpful.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) the Employment Service are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Miss Widdecombe: The great majority are in the administrative officer and administrative assistant grades.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Miss Widdecombe: Terms of employment vary according to grade and location. Appointment letters throughout the Employment Department group are based on Treasury guidance.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Olner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of the legal opinion he has received in respect of the legality of a unilateral ban on the export of calves.

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend has published a summary of the conclusions that emerged from the legal advice available to him. This was made available to all Members in my right hon. Friend's letter of 1 February copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many veal calves French authorities have refused to allow into France on *(a)* health and *(b)* welfare grounds in each month since December 1994; and how many British calves have arrived in France dead in each month since December 1994;

(2) how many livestock lorries French authorities have banned from entering France due to them not fulfilling animal welfare criteria in each month since December 1994.

Mrs. Browning: The French authorities are, of course, responsible for enforcing Community welfare provisions on their territory. From our exchanges with them, we are not aware that they have refused admission to France of any calves of British origin since December 1994 on either health or welfare grounds. The French authorities are not required to give us information on the number of animals dead on arrival. The information available to us indicates that deaths are rare. The French authorities tell us that they have not banned any British livestock vehicles.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Jack: Complete information on water and sewerage charges is not currently held centrally. There would be disproportionate cost in collecting it from the 260 properties occupied by the Ministry, but improvements to our database will enable us to make this information available from 1994–95.

Wild Salmon

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to conserve wild salmon.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 2 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *848*.

Veal Crates

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy in respect of the year in which veal crates will be banned throughout Europe.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* We shall continue to press for an early end to the use of close confinement systems for rearing calves. Although some member states can be expected to seek a transitional period before any such ban comes into force, we shall seek to ensure that this is kept to a minimum.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of milk quotas.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The current EC legislation on milk quotas does not expire until 31 March 2000. The future of the quota system will be reviewed before that date and the Government will be pressing for the replacement of quotas and price supports in the dairy sector by a free market for milk and milk products in which production is based on supply and demand. Meantime, we will continue to resist any further arbitrary cuts in the UK's inadequate quota, press for reductions in support prices and seek a change in the EC rules to permit the transfer of milk quota between producers in different member states.

Piscivorous Birds

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he has issued to fishery proprietors and others on recommended methods of scaring cormorants and saw-bill ducks away

from fisheries where they are causing or are likely to cause serious damage.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* Advice on predation of fisheries is given by ADAS, the Ministry's wildlife advisers, to those applying for licences to kill or take piscivorous birds under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, for the purposes of preventing serious damage to fisheries. This covers advice on the use of deterrents—for example, scaring with rockets or bird scaring cartridges and human presence; proofing and exclusion; habitat modification and adjusting the stocking regime.

The research programme on piscivorous birds currently being commissioned by the Ministry and the Department of the Environment aims to help establish appropriate management techniques in different situations for reducing the impact of these birds on inland fisheries.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds about the disturbance caused to other bird species by activity undertaken by fishery proprietors and others to scare away cormorants and saw-bill ducks which threaten to damage inland fisheries.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* I am not aware of any such representations having been received by this Ministry.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of cases of food poisoning that have been reported from *(a)* salmonella and *(b)* campylobacter in each of the last ten years.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

Data for 1981 to 1993 are published in the steering group on the microbiological safety of food, annual report 1993, copies of which are available in the Library.

The confirmed total for 1993 for all salmonellas is 30,654 and the provisional figure for 1994 is 30,427.

The provisional figure for 1994 for campylobacter is 44,315. The 1993 figure is still provisional at 39,383.

SCOTLAND

Anthrax

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many cases of anthrax were reported in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: The number of confirmed cases of anthrax reported in Scotland for the years in question is:

1985: 1
1986: 2
1987: 2
1988: 0
1989: 0
1990: 1
1991: 1
1992: 0
1993: 1
1994: 0

Scottish Homes' Tenants

Mr. Galbraith: (1) To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of circulating Scottish Homes' tenants in Strathkelvin with the Gemini housing association leaflet;

(2) who made the decision to circulate Scottish Homes' tenants in Strathkelvin with the Gemini housing association leaflet.

Lord James-Douglas Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

Police Escorts

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to Strathclyde police of providing necessary assistance to truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles through Strathclyde in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)*1994–95.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Strathclyde police escort all such vehicles from the force area boundary to their destination, but do not separately identify the costs of such duties.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of providing necessary assistance to truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles to *(a)* Central police, *(b)* Lothian police and *(c)* Dumfries and Galloway police.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None of these police forces is routinely involved in escorting duties for these vehicles. The Ministry of Defence police and military security provide the necessary escort.

Student Grants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that student grants meet the minimum social security income support threshold; and if the will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education.

Languages

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many teachers in Scotland are teaching English as a second language in public sectors schools; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of teachers in Scotland teaching English as a second language in public sector schools was collected for the first time in the 1994 annual school census. As this information is still being processed, figures are not available yet.

Victim Support

Dr. A Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to issue a leaflet for those persons who have suffered from criminal activities; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office funds Victim Support Scotland to deal with the interests of victims of crime. In 1995–96, this funding will rise

to £985,000. Victim Support Scotland already produces a number of leaflets to help those persons who have suffered from criminal activities. On 20 February 1995, a new booklet for victims of rape and sexual assault was launched in the presence of my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State. The Scottish Office was actively involved in its preparation and an additional grant of £8,000 was made to defray costs.

Public Appointments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the appointments he has made to non-departmental public bodies and national health service trusts since 2 March 1994.

Mr. Lang: As the information sought is extensive, I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for copies of the list to be placed in the Library of the House. The list records all appointments made by me, other than re-appointments, to non-departmental public bodies and NHS trusts over the 12 months commencing 2 March 1994.

Forestry

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much forestry owned by the Forestry Commission in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland has been sold in the last 10 years; if moneys obtained in this way are used to fund projects in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: In the 10 years to 31 December 1994, the Forestry Commission sold 43,847 hectares of forestry land in Scotland, of which 9,126 hectares were in Strathclyde. The money raised from the sale of Forestry Commission land is currently paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Parents Charter

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of producing his recent publication of the parents charter; and what is the budget for publicity for the booklet entitled "Higher Still: Opportunity for All".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* Cost incurred in producing and printing the updated parents charter in Scotland are of the order of £45,000. To date, 80,000 copies have been printed. Initially, 15,000 copies were circulated to schools and other interested parties. Such has been the popularity of the charter that requests have been received for a further 55,000 copies.

Costs incurred in producing and printing "Higher Still: Opportunity for All" were of the order of £10,000.

Maternity Hospitals

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many maternity hospitals in Scotland are located on the same site as acute hospital services.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* There are 53 maternity units where acute services are available on the same site.

Scottish Enterprise Tayside

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under which statute Scottish Enterprise Tayside may provide public fund assistance for tourist-related capital projects in Tayside; and what share of the total cost involved in approved projects may be paid out of public funds; and what provision has been made in respect of unique projects which began under the Scottish tourist board's grant scheme, to ensure that starting work did not prejudice applications for assistance towards each phase of the cost of the total project.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The activities of Scottish Enterprise Tayside, including the provision of assistance from public funds, are governed by the terms of its operating contract with Scottish Enterprise. The statutory powers and functions of Scottish Enterprise, including its power to delegate the discharge of some of these powers and functions, are set out in the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Act 1990, as amended. The other matters raised are operational matters for Scottish Enterprise and I have asked its chairman to write to my hon. Friend.

NHS Information and Computer Systems

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date a circular based on DBI Associates Ltd.'s report on NHS information and computer systems was issued to the general manager of the national breast screening service in Scotland; and what action has been taken to date on that circular by that manager.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The Scottish breast screening programme information system is supported by the computer centre which serves the Common Services Agency.

NHS management executive letter (1992) 45 entitled "Computer Security Guidelines", based on the DBI Associates Ltd.'s report, was issued in September 1992 to all health board general managers, the general manager of the CSA, NHS trust chief executives and unit general managers. It was also copied to all IT directors and computer centre managers.

A full external review of the SBSP information system was carried out in 1992–93 and it was confirmed that the system was working satisfactorily in all its components, including the call-re-call system.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what actions he took to ensure that all of the recommendations in DBI Associates Ltd.'s report on NHS information and computer systems were acted upon by NHS managers in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Computer security guidelines were issued under NHS MEL(1992)45 in September 1992. The circular notified health boards, NHS trusts and NHS computer centres of the outcome of the DBI study, offered guidance in the form of a guidance booklet and indicated what action was required.

A formal statement of security policy for the NHS in Scotland was agreed and issued in May 1993 under circular NHS MEL(1993)59. This spelled out the roles and responsibilities required within health boards and NHS trusts.

Under the security policy, all health boards and NHS trusts were required to appoint an IT security officer and

his duties were detailed. Health systems division also took steps to appoint an IT security specialist to enable the management executive to develop central guidance and advice.

A detailed IT security manual was produced by Health Systems Division and issued under circular NHS MEL(1994)75 in August 1994. The manual is intended for all staff involved in any aspect of IT systems.

Health systems division has sponsored further studies at eight national health service in Scotland sites in 1994–95.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the report on NHS information and computer systems carried out by DBI Associates Ltd. for the NHS management executive in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* A copy of the DBI Associates Ltd.'s report "IT Security Review for the DIS" is being placed in the Library of both Houses together with:

a) Management executive letter (1992) 45 attaching the document "IT Security Guidelines".

b) Management executive letter (1993) 59 attaching the document "IT Security Policy".

c) Management executive letter (1994) 75 attaching the documents comprising the "IT Security Manual".

The management executive letters have been extensively circulated within the NHS in Scotland.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the advice to be issued in April to health boards and trusts by the NHS national working group on the market testing of information technology services will be advisory or mandatory; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1992]:* As part of the market testing of computer services, a formal procurement exercise is underway involving three potential commercial suppliers and an in-house bid. The customers have, of course, been involved in the procurement process. Before best and final offers are invited from suppliers who have demonstrated their ability to meet NHS in Scotland requirements, health boards and trusts will state, on an individual basis, the services they require from the successful supplier. On receipt of best and final offers the national working group will evaluate the offers and recommend a winning supplier for each area. Health boards and NHS trusts will sign individual contract documents with the successful supplier for the services they have specified. It will be for each health board and NHS trust to decide whether it will sign the contract documents.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the membership of the NHS national working group on the market testing of information technology services:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The membership of the NHS working group on computer services is as follows:

Mr. L. E. Peterken	Chairman	Director of Special Projects
Mr. R. Calderwood	Chief Executive	Southern General NHS Trust
Miss L. Barrie	General Manager	Tayside Health Board
Mr. J. Hudson	Director of Finance	Tayside Health Board
Mr. I. C. Smith	General Manager	Argyll and Clyde Health Board
Mr. F. Gibb	Acting General Manager	Common Services Agency
Mr. D. Wright	Director of Acute Care Purchasing	Highland Health Board
Mr. J. Owens	Chief Executive	Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust
Mr. M. Ord	Chief Executive	Fife Health Care NHS Trust
Mr. C. Knox	Head of Computing and IT Strategy	Management Executive
Mr. D. Hogg	Branch Head	Management Executive

National working group meetings are also attended by the chairman and project managers for each of the three package areas as follows:

North/North East		
Chairman	Mr. R. Fletcher—Chief Executive	Angus NHS Trust
Project Manager	Mrs. R. Jack—IS Director	Grampian Health Board
	Mr. M. Murray	Grampian Health Board
West		
Chairman	Mr. K. Brewer—Chief Executive	Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Project Manager	Mr. W. Hart	Greater Glasgow Health Board
Central		
Chairman	Mr. K. Thomson—Chief Executive	Law Hospital NHS Trust
Project Manager	Mr. M. Cook	Lothian Health Board

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been issued centrally to health boards and trusts in respect of market testing of NHS information technology services and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The fundamental guidance to health boards and trusts on market testing is contained in the NHS circular GEN(1993)13 "Market Testing in the NHS".

In the course of market testing of the NHS computer services, the national working group on computer services has ensured that health boards and NHS trusts have been kept up to date with the progress of the exercise, the actions required of boards and trusts and the issues which have arisen.

Advice has been available to the NHS in Scotland through the central legal office on contractual matters and from the CCTA on procurement issues. The procurement is being conducted in accordance with EC procurement regulations.

Guidance to health boards and trusts has also been directed through local implementation groups for each of the three package areas—north/north-east, west and central—under which the service requirements of each individual board and trust have been co-ordinated and discussions and negotiations with potential suppliers have been held.

Breast Screening

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure that the national breast screening service in Scotland carries out a regular audit of systems it uses for patient recall and other patient centre activities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The national Scottish breast screening programme information system is run at local offices but nationally maintained, supported and developed in line with recognised NHS information technology standards.

Audit is a fundamental element of systems management and development and is undertaken regularly on the SBSP information system.

In 1992–93, a full external review of the system was commissioned by the SBSP. It was confirmed that the system was operating satisfactorily and all additional recommended enhancements have been put in place.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date Ministers were informed that a mistake had been made at Dundee royal infirmary in the patient recall system of the national breast screening service, in respect of the records of women who had used that service; and when a decision was taken by Ministers not to carry through a national check of the records of all the women who had used the service in Scotland since 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Ministers were informed of the procedural error which had occurred at the Dundee breast screening centre based at Dundee royal infirmary, on 2 December 1994. Ministers were kept informed about the action taken to check the records of all the women who had attended the Dundee centre since it opened in December 1989. Professional and medical advice was taken at all stages and, in particular, on the need to preserve patient confidentiality.

The other six Scottish breast screening centres were asked to check their fail-safe procedures immediately and confirmed that they were fully operational in line with the tight standards set by the Scottish breast screening programme to minimise the risk of error. In addition, a check of all the interval cancers—that is, cancers which occur in the three-yearly interval between screenings—identified in the SBSP was instituted to ensure that no other cancers had been diagnosed following such a procedural error. This was the case.

The Scottish breast screening programme decided that the scale of any problem should be fully assessed before taking any action which would cause public alarm. The Dundee record review showed a rate of procedural errors which was 1.1 in 10,000 screenings. Against that background and the action which had already been taken to verify fail-safe procedures and check interval cancers, SBSP professionals considered that they should undertake a managed review of all Scottish records without causing disruption to the screening programme.

That recommendation was made to Ministers on 2 March 1995. They agreed immediately that, in the light of public concern, a review exercise should commence in the other six Scottish breast screening centres to offer full reassurance to women.

Disabled Employees

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* At 1 July 1994, 1.4 per cent. of non-industrial staff within the Scottish Office core and its executive agencies other than the Scottish Prison Service were registered disabled. Central personnel records indicated that a further 0.2 per cent. of staff were disabled, although not registered.

At that time, 0.05 per cent. of non-industrial staff in the Scottish Prison Service were registered disabled.

In 1993, the Scottish Office and its agencies—excluding the Scottish Prison Service other than headquarters administration staff—together with its associated departments of General Register Office for Scotland and Scottish Records Office, undertook a survey of disability and long-term health conditions in the workplace. Some 1.7 per cent. of staff identified themselves as registered disabled. Moreover, a total of 5 per cent. of staff indicated that they were affected "a great deal" or "to some extent" by some form of disability or long-term health condition.

DEFENCE

Royal Marines Reserve

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans for the future of the Royal Marines Reserve.

Mr. Soames: The size of the Royal Marines Reserve has been examined to determine whether there should be some adjustment in the light of the current strategic environment. We have concluded that there should be no major reduction in strength. We continue to look at the roles of the Royal Marines Reserve to ensure the best utilisation of their many skills.

Medals (Second World War Veterans)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he proposes to take to expedite the issue of medals to second world war veterans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department's medal offices have already taken measures to expedite the issue of awards and medals to those who served in the second world war. Additional staff have been allocated to the task of assessing claims for medals and overtime is being worked on a regular basis to reduce the backlog. We do not believe that it would be helpful to recruit new staff for assessment work as the task of training and supervising them would divert existing staff from the work in hand and would lead to further delays. Given the number of claims received and the time-consuming and exacting nature of assessing entitlements, medals for second world war veterans are being issued as quickly as possible.

Military Vehicles

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many unscheduled stops there have been involving truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles since

January 1994; and if he will provide a breakdown of the circumstances which resulted in these incidents.

Mr. Soames: Between January 1994 and 13 March 1995, there were four occasions on which truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles were obliged to make unscheduled stops to deal with technical problems. The circumstances are set out in the table.

TCHD Mk 2 operational convoy unscheduled stops (29 January 1994 to 13 March 1995)

				Cause			
Serial number	*Date*	*Location*	*Fault*	*Quality*	*Design*	*Rectification*	*Delay time*
1	6 June 1994	M1, Tibshelf near Mansfield	Knocking sound from tractor unit	—	—	Precautionary stop, no fault found.	33 minutes
2	7 June 1994	A696, south of Otterburn	Air pressure warning buzzer sounded	—	—	Air pressure found satisfactory.	34 minutes
3	2 August 1994	A68, south east of Edinburgh	"Clonking" sound when turning	—	—	Precautionary stop, no fault found.	26 minutes
4	21 September 1994	A696, near Ponteland	Discharge from sump oil connecting pipe	—	—	Tractor unit changed.	[1] 1 hour 10 minutes

Note:
[1]The fault developed shortly after departure. After replacement of the spare tractor unit the convoy returned to await arrival of a substitute spare unit. Movement therefore suspended for 24 hours.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of maintaining and operating convoys of truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles and their escort in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95.

Mr. Soames: The truck cargo heavy duty mark II entered operational service in September 1992. In 1992–93 the cost of operating the convoys—including their MOD escorts—and maintaining the vehicles was about £800,000; in 1993–94, £1,200,000; and to date in 1994–95, £950,000.

United States Bases

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United States bases and facilities were located in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1989 and *(c)* 1992; and how many such bases and facilities there are at present.

Mr. Soames: The number of United States bases and facilities in the United Kingdom at the end of each years in question was 75, 73 and 54 respectively. At present, there are 44 United States bases and facilities in the United Kingdom.

European Armaments Agency

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the European Armaments Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department is playing a full part in discussions in the western European armaments group on the concept of a European armaments agency. Our support for the establishment of an agency would be subject to its adding value to existing arrangements. Initially, an agency would be concerned with co-operative activities on behalf of member nations; the conditions do not exist for an agency to undertake the full range of procurement activities.

European Defence Market

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications of article 223 of the treaty of Rome for the development of a common European defence market.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom has been working in the western European armaments group towards the liberalisation of the European defence equipment market. The existence of article 223 of the treaty of Rome does not prevent nations from agreeing to an open defence equipment market.

Procurement Executive

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and by whom the decision was taken to site the Procurement Executive at Abbey Wood, Bristol; how many employees will work there; what is the estimated value of Abbey Wood; and how much *(a)* has been and *(b)* will be spent on the site to provide suitable accommodation.

Mr. Freeman: The Government's decision to site the Procurement Executive headquarters at Abbey Wood was announced in November 1991. Current plans envisage that some 4,300 PE staff, together with a further 600 PE-related project support and integrated logistics systems personnel, will work at Abbey Wood. Consideration is being given to accommodating additional staff at Abbey Wood to allow further rationalisation of MOD property holdings.

The project is estimated to yield some £40 million in direct annual departmental running cost savings and will enable annual PE staff reductions of some £35 million

which the PE was already committed to prior to the defence costs study.

The defence costs study reconfirmed that the project represented good value for money and would support additional annual savings worth a further £30 million by taking advantage of the benefit of the new working environment at Abbey Wood, improved working practices, and a more streamlined organisation.

The estimated cost of the Abbey Wood development, inclusive of site acquisition, construction, fitting out, professional works management fees and VAT, is £254,136 million at 1993 prices of which some £134,6 million, inclusive of VAT, has been spent to date. The project remains within budget.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the estimated total cost of the new Procurement Executive headquarters at Abbey Wood in Bristol;

(2) how many people will be employed at the Procurement Executive headquarters based at Abbey Wood in Bristol;

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I have given to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) today.

Western European Union

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is considering to enhance Britain's ability to partake in future Western European Union military operations.

Mr. Soames: The Government have suggested a number of areas in which the WEU will need to develop its ability to mount effective European-led missions, and which will in turn enhance the United Kingdom's ability to partake in such operations. These were set out in the "Memorandum on the United Kingdom Government's approach to the treatment of European Defence Issues at the 1996 Inter-governmental Conference" that has recently been placed in the Library of the House. The memorandum explains that a key element will be the successful implementation of the combined joint task force initiative, launched at the 1994 NATO summit, whereby NATO can make available separable but not separate elements of its command structure for European-led missions. We believe that there is also a need to strengthen the WEU's planning capabilities and to put in place other measures to ensure that the WEU has the necessary capacity to organise, mount and control operations. These measures include development of practical arrangements such as a situation centre and improved intelligence handling capabilities. The Government have indicated their intention to make a significant contribution to this, including making available relevant national expertise.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the types of military operations in which the Western European Union should be able to participate.

Mr. Soames: Our proposals on these matters have been set out in the "Memorandum on the United Kingdom's approach to the treatment of European Defence Issues at the 1996 Inter-governmental Conference", copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. Under this approach, the Government believe that defence of the territory of NATO member states should remain a matter for NATO, in accordance with article 5 of the Washington treaty. In this context, the role of the Western European Union should be to act as a more effective European pillar of the alliance. But, in the new strategic environment, we believe that military forces are more likely to be used for: crisis management combat operations; peacekeeping tasks, including embargo or sanctions enforcement; and humanitarian and rescue missions. There may also be other tasks, such as the evacuation of our nationals from trouble spots, which are normally a national responsibility but where it may well make sense for European nations involved to act together. The Government believe that it is on these tasks that the WEU should concentrate without in any way claiming an exclusive prerogative to tackle particular operations.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether any proposed reforms of the Western European Union will require changes to: *(a)* the 1948 Brussels treaty and *(b)* the Maastricht treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We assess that the Government's proposals for the handling of defence issues at the 1996 intergovernmental conference would not necessarily require amendment of either treaty.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the Western European Union's decision-making process and of how this process can be enhanced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Government's proposals for the handling of defence issues at the 1996 intergovernmental conference include, as a major element, the creation of a new WEU body at head of state and Government level, involving full members of the WEU, association members and observers, with the aim of providing a reinforced decision-making process for matters related to European defence and for mobilising effective European military capabilities.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the use of Western European Union associate partners in future Western European Union military operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Our intention will be to seek to ensure that the arrangements that are set in hand for the development of the WEU allow for the voluntary participation of association partners in missions undertaken by the WEU, where appropriate.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy concerning European burden sharing in relation to future developments in the Western European Union.

Mr. Soames: It is the Government's view that European members of NATO should develop arrangements in the defence and security field that will ensure that they are able, collectively, to shoulder more effectively their share of the burden of promoting security and stability on the European continent, on its periphery and beyond. The Government will also want to see arrangements put in place that ensure that the burden is shared equitably among European nations. The proposals that we have made to our partners, in the context of the

review of defence matters at the 1996 intergovernmental conference, are designed to promote these aims, among others.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constitute.

Mr. Freeman: The available figures requested are as follows:

Full time equivalent United Kingdom based civilian staff rounded to nearest hundred

	1 April 1990	*1 April 1991*	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 January 1995*
Total MOD staff	142,900	141,500	141,000	131,600	124,100	120,300
Total casual staff	1,500	1,300	1,500	2,400	2,500	2,800
as a percentage of total	1.05	0.92	1.06	1.82	2.01	2.33
Total casual staff with 51 or more weeks of service	n/a	n/a	n/a	200	300	400
as a percentage of total	—	—	—	0.15	0.24	0.33
Total casual staff with less than 51 weeks of service	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,200	2,200	2,400
as a percentage of total	—	—	—	1.67	1.77	2.00
Total agency staff	3,100	25,300	27,500	30,300	29,400	28,500
Total agency casual staff	0	200	200	400	500	500
as a percentage of total agency staff	0.00	0.79	0.73	1.32	1.70	1.75
Total agency casual staff with 51 or more weeks of service	n/a	n/a	n/a	100	100	100
as a percentage of total agency staff	—	—	—	0.33	0.34	0.35
Total agency casual staff with less than 51 weeks of service	n/a	n/a	n/a	300	400	400
as a percentage of total agency staff	—	—	—	0.99	1.36	1.40

Note:
Figures marked as n/a are not available. The information has been held in a form which allows such analysis only since April 1993.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Freeman: The fact that casual staff are recruited only where there is a genuine management need for short-term assistance—for example to cover unexpected and unforeseen increases in work load—means that it is not possible to predict the demand for casual staff. My Department cannot, therefore, forecast numbers needed one or more years in advance. Casual appointments may not exceed two years, even in exceptional cases. If the staff requirement can be identified far enough in advance, or if it is likely to be of longer duration, then other recruitment action should be taken and staff should be employed on different terms of service.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Freeman: The figures available for UK-based staff are as follows:

Leaving date in financial year	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Staff employed more than once as casuals with a total of less than 51 weeks service	333	228	265
Casual staff employed more than once as casuals with a total of 51 weeks or more service	19	39	50

In no case were staff employed under these terms for two years or more. Information on the positions held by staff in each appointment is not available without a manual search of all the relevant personnel records.

Data for earlier years are not available in a form which would enable this analysis to be done except at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Freeman: My Department and its executive agencies issue general guidance to managers and specific guidance to recruitment authorities on the circumstances in which it may be appropriate to recruit casual staff. This guidance incorporates the principles of the civil service management code, and emphasises that casual staff should be appointed only where there is management requirement

for short-term assistance. Casual staff should not be recruited if the requirement is likely to be longer term.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Freeman: Information about individual posts and individual lengths of contract held by casual staff is held manually and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Details of casual staff in my Department and its agencies categorised by broad occupational groups, showing those who have served fewer than 51 weeks and those who have served 51 weeks or more are as follows:

Non-agency non-industrial casual staff with less than 51 weeks service as at March 1995

	Number
Admin and secretarial staff	1,066
Specialist staff	106
Medical staff	104
Students	131
Miscellaneous	76

Non-agency non-industrial casual staff with 51 or more weeks service as at March 1995

	Number
Admin and secretarial staff	119
Specialist staff	25
Medical staff	23
Students	10
Miscellaneous	11

Agency non-industrial casual staff with less than 51 weeks service as at March 1995

	Number
Admin and secretarial staff	141
Specialist staff	75
Medical staff	1
Students	77
Miscellaneous	24

Agency non-industrial casual staff with 51 weeks service or more as at March 1995

	Number
Admin and secretarial staff	38
Specialist staff	24
Medical staff	1
Students	10
Miscellaneous	0

Industrial casual staff including agencies

	Number
Industrial casual staff with less than 51 weeks service	1,171
Industrial casual staff with 51 weeks service or more	171

Records by agency for industrial staff are not held in the form requested and could be extracted only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration;

(2) if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Freeman: No distinction is made between casual staff employed for 51 weeks or less than 51 weeks. Casual staff are recruited to fill short-term appointments of up to one year—and, exceptionally, up to two years—in accordance with the civil service management code. These centrally prescribed principles and standards are reflected in departmental or agency rules. Letters of appointment state the terms and conditions of service for such staff as set out in departmental or agency manuals, but may also be amended to reflect particular departmental needs—for example, full or part-time appointment.

Remploy

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cost of each contract that his Department has awarded to Remploy in each year since 1990.

Mr. Freeman: Costs of individual contracts awarded by the Ministry of Defence are commercial in Confidence. Therefore I am unable to provide the hon. Gentleman with the information he has requested. However, I can give the total annual cost of contracts awarded to Remploy for the period requested, and these are detailed below. The average number of contracts won by Remploy over the same period was 35 per year.

1990–91: 12.3 million
1991–92: 18.7 million
1992–93: 16.6 million
1993–94: 18.8 million
1994–95: 10.8 million

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 16 March 1995

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mining Subsidence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive British Coal's sixth report on the administration of the coal mining subsidence damage repair and compensation scheme.

Mr. Page: I have now received this report from British Coal and have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

Emergency Services (Caller Identification)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations he has given to introducing a statutory responsibility for British Telecom to extend caller line identification to the emergency services.

Mr. Ian Taylor: BT operators already provide the emergency services with information about callers, including caller identification where technically possible. BT is also working to provide a direct CLI service in London, where it has been requested by an emergency authority.

East Germany (Reconstruction)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the likely effect on United Kingdom trade in 1996, 1997 and 1998 of reconstruction in the former East Germany; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of the extent to which the United Kingdom will become less competitive than Germany.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Germany is the United Kingdom's largest export market. Over 1,000 British firms have subsidiaries or joint ventures there, and this country is among the leading investors in the new Länder.

Annual growth of 8 to 10 per cent. is expected in the new Länder over the next few years, and 2.5 to 3 per cent. in Germany as a whole. Britain's market share is on the increase, and there is no reason why this should not continue.

The Government have been active in developing trade promotion initiatives in key sectors of the new Länder which will help British companies, in the United Kingdom and in Germany, to capitalise on trade openings in 1995 and beyond.

Some of the newly established German plant in the new Länder is likely to be highly competitive but the prospects for UK firms are excellent. The gap in manufacturing productivity between this country and Germany has narrowed since 1979, and the Government remain committed to creating the right framework for improving industrial competitiveness. The United Kingdom's continuing ability to attract very significant inward investment is a testament to the competitiveness policies that the Government are pursuing.

Water and Sewerage Expenditure

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Taylor: Within DTI, information on expenditure on water and sewerage is not held centrally. Expenditure in relation to DTI's London headquarters buildings was as follows:

Year	*Cost* £
1994–95	[1]44,055
1993–94	52,618
1992–93	65,595
1991–92	62,006

[1] To end of January.

EMPLOYMENT

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made with the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The project to implement jobseeker's allowance, subject to parliamentary approval of the Jobseekers Bill, is on schedule for implementation in April 1996. Planning guidance has now been issued to the Employment Service and Benefits Agency field organisations. An external review of the project is under way and will report in early April.

World Conference on Women

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who will represent the United Kingdom at the fourth UN world conference on women.

Miss Widdecombe: I am pleased to announce that key members of the delegation to represent the Government at the fourth UN world conference on women vote held in Peking from 4 to 15 September, have now been agreed. Three Ministers will be in attendance during the period of the conference: myself, my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, and my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Government appointed co-chairman of the Women's National Commission.

They will be joined by Kamlesh Bahl, chairwoman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, Great Britain, Joan Smyth, chair and chief executive of the Equal Opportunities Commission, Northern Ireland, and Liz Bavidge, elected co-chair of the Women's National Commission. We also expect to include delegates from Hong Kong, Bermuda, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands, further representation from non-governmental organisations with expertise on women in development and officials from the

relevant Government Departments to support the work of the delegation.

Employment Initiatives

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration he gives to regional differences when developing plans for employment initiatives; and what initiatives will be the subject of legislation in the near future.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's initiatives are targeted primarily on those who need it most, particularly those who have been unemployed for some time. Other than provisions in the Jobseekers Bill, no legislation on initiatives is planned for the near future.

Productivity Increases

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's policy on increases in productivity being rewarded by increases in pay; and what evidence he has of the extent to which that principle has been followed in the *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* service industries.

Mr. Oppenheim: The extent to which increases in productivity are rewarded by increases in pay is a matter for organisations to decide in the light of their particular circumstances. However, productivity is one of many factors which need to be taken into account when making such decisions. The Employment Department does not collect data on how far productivity influences such decisions, but whereas both productivity and pay stagnated from 1974–1979, both productivity and real pay at all levels have risen sharply since 1979.

The Government, however, also believe that increases in pay need to be more than matched by improvements in productivity in order to free resources for investment, which in turn will feed through to greater competitiveness.

South Thames TEC

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who is still owed money by the South Thames training and enterprise council; how much they are owed; and when they will be paid.

Mr. Paice: The total amount of money owing to individual contractors which submitted claims for payment for work carried out for South Thames training and enterprise council is a matter for the receiver.

Unemployed Students

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the hours of guided learning undertaken by a student *(a)* in the evening and *(b)* on Saturdays will count towards the new 16-hour limit for guided learning allowed to unemployed students who are required to be available for work; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: All hours that are classified as guided learning hours will count towards the threshold of 16 guided learning hours per week.

The Further Education Funding Council has introduced the definition of guided learning hours in place of the distinction between part and full-time courses. This reflects the fact that courses are increasingly delivered flexibly, to meet the needs of individuals. The Government's proposals for the rules under jobseeker's allowance are designed to accommodate this change, while ensuring that the same number of people will be able to benefit as do so now.

SCOTLAND

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which permanent secretaries have left his Department's employment in the last five years; and which public positions they have been appointed to subsequently.

Mr. Lang: There is only one permanent secretary at the Scottish Office and he has been in post for over five years.

Sheriffs

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he proposes to introduce in the procedures for appointing sheriffs.

Mr. Lang: These procedures are kept under constant review. A number of improvements were introduced in the procedures adopted in a recently completed round of temporary shrieval appointments. Consideration is now being given to the further development of these procedures and their application to the appointment of permanent sheriffs. it is proposed that applications will be sought, by annual advertisement, for these appointments and that suitable candidates will be interviewed by a panel, whose membership will include lay representation. Consultation on the proposals will take place shortly and I shall arrange for copies of the consultation paper to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Further Education

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he proposes to publish his report on the discharge of his duties for further education in Scotland as required under section 1 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to say that the report entitled "Further Education in Scotland 1994: Report by the Secretary of State for Scotland" has been published today and has been laid before each House of Parliament. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

The report shows that good progress has been made in further education colleges in 1994. Members of the college boards of management and college staff continue to manage enthusiastically the changes and challenges arising from incorporation. The colleges have built on the success of the first year of incorporation and are working hard to continue to raise standards and increase efficiency.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G.J.W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)*

Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* Neither I nor any of the Ministers in my Department had meetings with representatives of any of these organisations.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects decisions to be announced regarding *(a)* the possible transfer to agency or private status of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office and *(b)* the possible merger of the fraud divisions of the Crown Prosecution Service with the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 8 July, *Official Report*, column *337*. The steering group on agency status has not yet concluded its work.

The consideration of merger group has reported its findings. The report is at present under consideration.

Decisions will be announced as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Leeds Central Infirmary

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Prime Minister what highly specialised form of treatment was available to Mr. Murray at Leeds Central infirmary.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has asked for an initial report on this matter from South Thames regional office in the near future. A report will be published as soon as possible thereafter, and any issues arising will be further investigated. It would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral Statement of 9 March, *Official Report*, columns *455–56*, which companies provided the independent financial and legal advice to the Government on the question of whether to proceed with the sale of National Power and PowerGen; and when the advice was received.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* The Treasury took advice on the evening of Friday 3 March from its financial advisers, Barclays de Zoete Wedd Limited and Kleinwort Benson Limited and its legal adviser, Slaughter and May.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

50th Anniversary

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what expenditure will be incurred in the current financial year on the commemorations to mark the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell: The cost in 1994–95 of commemorations to mark the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of world war II is expected to be £3,000,000. I announced on 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *424–25*, that parliamentary approval for this new service would be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department of National Heritage's film, tourism, sport and broadcasting vote, class XI, vote 5. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure of up to £3,000,000 will be met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage for this year and each of the past three years how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information for the Department of National Heritage and its two agencies—the Royal Parks Agency and the Historic Royal Palaces Agency—is as follows:

Year	*DNH*		*RPA*		*HRPA*	
	51 weeks	*Less than 51 weeks*	*51 weeks*	*Less than 51 weeks*	*51 weeks*	*Less than 51 weeks*
1990	—	—	—	—	Nil	19
1991	—	—	—	—	Nil	22
1992	—	—	—	—	Nil	52
1993	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	62
1994	Nil	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	51
1995	Nil	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	58

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past three years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The Department of National Heritage was created in April 1992. It has two agencies—the Royal Parks Agency created in April 1993 and the Historic Royal Palaces Agency created in October 1989. The information requested is shown in the following table.

(a) Less than 51 weeks

Years	DNH		RPA		HRPA		Total	
	Number of casuals	Percentage of total staff	Number of casuals	Percentage of total staff	Number of casuals	Percentage of total staff	Number of casuals	Percentage of total staff
1990	—	—	—	—	66	19.4 (340)	66	19.4 (340)
1991	—	—	—	—	66	18 (365)	66	18 (365)
1992	—	—	—	—	69	19.4 (355)	69	19.4 (355)
1993	1	0.3	—	—	127	33 (961.5)	128	13.3 (961.5)
1994	11	3.4	11	4.4	103.5	22 (1,059)	125.5	11.9 (1,059)
1995	3	0.8	13	4.6	48.5	10.3 (1,084.5)	65	6 (1,084.5)

b) 51 weeks Nil for all years

Explanatory note: These figures are based on staff in post returns for 1 April each year, except for 1995 where they are based on the most recent staff in post return—1 January. Figures in ( ) represent total staff in post for each year.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information for the Department of National Heritage and its two agencies—the Royal Parks Agency and the Historic Royal Palaces Agency—is as follows.

The Department of National Heritage does not anticipate recruiting any staff on temporary contracts over the next three years.

The Royal Parks Agency expects to recruit two full-time staff and one part-time member of staff on temporary contracts of less than 51 weeks duration. The Historic Royal Palaces Agency expects to employ 53 members of staff on contracts of less than 51 weeks duration during 1995, 21 in 1996 and 22 in 1997. It is not possible to say, for any of these anticipated vacancies, whether previous temporary staff will fill the posts.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The latest available information shows for DNH and its two agencies—the Royal Parks Agency and the Historic Royal Palaces Agency is as follows:

	Contracts of less than 51 weeks
DNH	Administrative assistant Administrative officer Personal secretary Statistical officer
RPA	Administrative officer Grooms
HRPA	Administrative assistant Administrative officer Warders Shop staff

No positions in the Department of National Heritage or its two agencies are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of 51 weeks.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration;

(2) what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) in his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The Department and its agencies—the Royal Parks Agency and the Historic Royal Palaces Agency—have their own independent personnel units which produce separate recruitment and appointment documentation. The terms of employment are set out in letters of appointment and I have placed copies of these for the Department and each of its agencies in the Library of the House.

In the recruitment and appointment of casual employees the Department and its agencies are guided by the relevant civil service central policies. These policies are contained in the personnel management section of the civil service management code which sets down the principal recruitment rules for casual staff and is consistent with the provisions of the Civil Service Order in Council Regulations. I have placed copies of the relevant extracts of these documentations as annexes to the appointment letters in the Library of the House. My Department and its agencies also operate all recruitment within current employment legislation.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Information

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will specify what code of conduct applies

to information on Government business supplied by Ministers to staff employed by them as House of Commons secretaries and researchers; and if such staff are governed by a code of conduct analogous to the Official Secrets Act for civil servants with respect to such business.

Mr. David Hunt: House of Commons secretaries and researchers are not employed by the Government and are not therefore subject to rules of conduct applying to the civil service. Like other citizens, they are subject to relevant provisions of the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent reports have been received concerning leakages of information concerning Government business from staff employed by Government Ministers as House of Commons secretaries and researchers.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many requests for information have been made to Departments following the introduction of the open government code; how many of these requests have been *(a)* met and *(b)* refused; and in how many cases of requests, Departments have had to review refusals to release information;

(2) if he will give the current figures of charges made by individual Departments and agencies for information requested under the open government code;

(3) when the Government's review of the operation of the open government code will be published.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply today to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). Copies of the Government's report on the implementation of the code of practice on access to Government information during 1994 are available in the Library of the House. Appendix 1 of the report gives figures for the numbers of code requests received by Departments in 1994, the numbers of requests refused in full or in part, and the numbers of internal reviews conducted by Departments. A schedule of departmental charging schemes for information requested under the code is included as appendix 4.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the operation of the code of practice on access to Government information during 1994.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today announced the publication of the Government's report on the operation of the code of practice during 1994, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Personal Records

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when legislation will be introduced to give effect to the commitment in the Open Government White Paper, Cm 2290 1993, to create a right of access to personal records and a right of access to health and safety information.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *15*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turkey

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to the Turkish Government regarding *(a)* the killing of civilians, *(b)* the destruction of homes and villages and *(c)* general abuses of human rights.

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised our concerns about human rights in Turkey with the Turkish Foreign Minister in London on 2 February. My right hon. Friend subsequently met the Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister at the EU-Turkey Association Council on 6 March. They were left in no doubt of our human rights concerns and those or our European partners. We shall continue to take every opportunity, at ministerial and official level, to remind the Turks of the need for improvement in their human rights performance.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations to the Turkish Government he has made regarding the activities of Turkish special intelligence—MIT—in Britain.

Mr. David Davis: None.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the numbers of Kurdish refugees from Turkey in northern Iraq; what contribution is being made towards UNHCR programmes in that area; if he will list the British non-governmental organisations which are involved in implementing the relief programmes; and what representations he has made to the Turkish authorities regarding their military activity against the civilian population in the border areas with northern Iraq.

Mr. David Davis: The following British registered non-governmental organisations are receiving assistance from ODA for helping with relief work among the Kurds: British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Kurdish Life Aid, Mines Advisory Group, Oxfam and Save the Children Fund.

We frequently make clear to the Turkish Government, at ministerial and official level, our view that the conflict in the south-east of Turkey must be settled within the rule of law and with due respect for human rights.

We are seeking the further information requested by the hon. Member. I shall write to him with this information as soon as it is obtained.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the involvement of the Turkish Government in crimes of violence in London; what representations he has made to the Turkish authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We have made no representations to the Turkish Government relating to crimes of violence in London.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received that Turkish military aircraft have penetrated northern Iraq and bombed refugee camps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We are not aware of any recent reports of Turkish military aircraft bombing refugee camps in northern Iraq. We have made clear to the Turkish Government our view that the conflict in the south-east of Turkey must be settled within the rule of law and with due respect for human rights.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *686*, if he will provide details of the contract, firm, designate, costs and outcome of the arbitration case involving his Department and a consultancy.

Mr. Goodlad: Arbitration has not yet been completed. Because the arbitration process is confidential, it would be inappropriate for me to give details of the case at this stage.

Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at which British post overseas Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi, the leader of the Soldiers of God, based in Pakistan, was issued with a visa to visit the United Kingdom; if the application was referred to London; if the application was referred to the Foreign Secretary or ministerial colleagues in his Department or to the Home Office for a recommendation prior to the decision being taken on Mr. Farooqi's application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Mr. Farooqi was last issued with a United Kingdom visa by our high commission at Islamabad in July 1994. He already held multiple entry visas for the United States and Australia and had been issued with UK visas in 1991 and 1992. At the time he appeared to meet the requirements of the immigration rules, so his application was not referred to London.

Kenya

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Kenya concerning the arrest and imprisonment of opposition Member of Parliament, Mr. Njenge Mungai.

Mr. Baldry: We remain deeply concerned about such arrests. Our high commission has raised this issue at the highest level with the Kenyan Government.

North-West Atlantic Fisheries Dispute

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current fisheries dispute between the EU and Canada in the north-west Atlantic.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The dispute is about allocating the total allowable catch from Greenland halibut among the contracting parties in the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation—in particular the EU and Canada. The goal of all involved must be to conserve fish stocks so as to allow fishermen from both the EU and Canada a viable future. This requires proper conservation measures, including an equitable division of the agreed total allowable catch. It also requires strict enforcement to ensure that the rules are obeyed by all. We are pleased to hear that the Spanish vessel detained last week has been released. All concerned can now concentrate on resolving the wider issues through negotiation, in a way acceptable to the members of NAFO.

The UK has been using its position as a member of both the Commonwealth and the EU to promote solutions to the immediate difficulties and to contribute to an outcome in the longer term which is satisfactory to all. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs yesterday spoke to his Canadian and Spanish opposite numbers as part of those efforts. The way ahead must be through negotiations undertaken in a calm and co-operative spirit and by avoiding actions which might make a solution more difficult.

EDUCATION

School Toilet Facilities

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many and what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school have outside toilets;

(2) how many and what percentage of schools fail to provide one toilet for every 20 pupils over five years old;

(3) how many and what percentage of schools do not have hot and cold running water in all hand basins for their toilet areas.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools have no suitable toilet facilities for disabled pupils.

Mr. Forth: This information is not yet available. Local Education Authorities and the Funding Agency for Schools are required to provide such data to the Secretary of State after 1 May and by 1 June 1995, and biennially thereafter.

School Budgets

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special schools overspent their budget in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Non-statutory Services

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the extent to which local education authorities are expanding in relation over the last two years non-statutory services at the expense of statutory education services; and if she will list the increase in expenditure on non-statutory services in each local education authority in the last two years.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information at LEA level on statutory and non-statutory spending is not available, as LEAs' returns of their expenditure do not distinguish between expenditure on pupils of statutory and non statutory school age.

Estimated outturn expenditure in 1994–95 by LEAs on under-fives, further education for adults, the youth service and discretionary awards total £1,964 million. Provisional outturn expenditure on these headings in 1993–94 was £1,858 million.

School Inspectors' Reports

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what recent representations she has received from parents and governors about the standards of reports published by school inspectors; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will make a statement on the publication of parent-friendly reports by school inspectors;

(3) what action she intends to take to ensure that teachers in schools in West Yorkshire have full confidence in inspectors working for the Office of Standards in Education; and if she will make a statement;

(4) what recent representations she has received on the standards of reports issued by school inspectors; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Department has received two letters about the standards of individual school reports in the last six months. Such letters are normally referred to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector as the independent Office for Standards in Education is responsible for monitoring the quality of inspection reports. Ofsted is also responsible for the employment of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools and for the training and monitoring of registered inspectors.

The content of inspection reports is similarly a matter for HMCI. The Government's intention is that reports should be rigorous, clear and easily understood by parents. HMCI has recently issued guidance to registered inspectors on making inspection report summaries more user friendly. He is also consulting on a revision to the framework for inspection and this includes taking the views of parents, teachers and others.

LEA Funding

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average standard spending assessment for primary school pupils for local education authorities in England; and what is the average for local education authorities excluding the Isles of Scilly and inner London boroughs.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average amount per five to 10-year-old which local education authorities in England will receive in the primary sub-block of their education standard spending assessments for 1995–96 is £1,981. The comparable figure for local education authorities excluding the Isles of Scilly and inner London boroughs is £1,941.

The Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment has been made of the effect on children's education following the proposed reduction in funding for schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The local government finance settlement for England for 1995–96 allows a 1.1 per cent. cash increase over the equivalent figure for 1994–95. The effect of the settlement will depend on decisions made by local education authorities and schools.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the net standard spending assessment for *(a)* a child of primary school age and *(b)* a child of secondary school age in Shropshire and in the London borough of Southwark for the financial year 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: The standing spending assessment for a pupil of primary school age for the financial year 1995–96 in Shropshire is £1,862 and in Southwark £2,947. For a child of secondary school age, the figures are £2,482 for Shropshire, and £4,097 for Southwark. These differences arise from disparities in assessed education spending need and costs between different areas.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the standard spending assessment for Hereford and Worcester following the transfer of five schools to Birmingham from 1 April.

Mr. Robin Squire: The standard spending assessment for Hereford and Worcester reflects the transfer of five schools to Birmingham from 1 April.

London Borough of Havering

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what representations she has received following the announcement of the education settlement for 1995–96 for the London borough of Havering.

Mr. Forth: We have received representations from the hon. Member and others about Havering's education standard spending assessment for 1995–96. The reduction results from a number of factors, including a below average increase in pupil numbers and other reductions in indicators of spending need.

School Buildings

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools had to close all or part of a school building because its condition posed a danger to staff and pupils in each of the last two years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not held centrally.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what provisions exist for education on the dangers and prevention of solvent abuse, and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The national curriculum, which all maintained schools must provide, requires that pupils are taught about the harmful effects of solvent abuse. My Department is providing £6 million of new grant to support teacher training and innovative projects concerned with the prevention of drug and solvent abuse. Following recent consultation, we will also issue shortly guidance on drug prevention and schools, together with guidance on teaching about drugs within the school curriculum and a digest of drug education teaching materials.

Branch Employment

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Eduction how many people were employed in the *(a)* grant-maintained schools branch, *(b)* further education branch, *(c)* teacher training branch and *(d)* higher education branch of her Department for each year since 1992–93; how many are forecast to work in each branch

in 1995–96; what was the pay bill for each branch in each year since 1992–93; and what is the forecast pay bill in 1995–96.

Mr. Boswell: The distribution of responsibilities among branches within the Department was reorganised in 1994. No one branch is or has been solely responsible for grant-maintained schools: presently both school organisation branch and schools funding branch have, among their other duties, responsibility for such schools. Certain duties also fall to the Funding Agency for Schools. The further education branch and higher education branch also took their present form in 1994, each taking over some of the responsibilities of the former student affairs branch. Work on teacher training is part of the work of the teachers branch; significant responsibilities also rest with the teacher training agency. Figures are not therefore available in the form sought. The full-time equivalent staff employed in the five branches at 14 March 1995, forecast average staff numbers in 1995–96 and budgets for the two years are as follows:

	1994–95[1]		*1995–96*[2]	
	Staff at 14 March 1995	*£ million*	*Staff*	*£ million*
School organisation branch	283	6.6	304	7.1
Schools funding branch	95	2.3	107	2.7
Further education branch	66	1.6	74	1.9
Higher education branch	79	2.0	78	2.0
Teachers branch	72	1.8	65	1.4

[1] Forecast outturn.
[2] Budget allocations.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government of Northern Ireland Act 1920

13. **Mr. Heppel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes he is proposing to the Government of Northern Ireland Act 1920.

Mr. Ancram: We have expressed a willingness, in the joint framework document, to amend or replace what little remains of the Government of Ireland Act as part of and contingent upon an agreed, comprehensive settlement, to emphasise the principle of consent. The precise detail of any changes would be a matter for discussion, negotiation and agreement with the political parties in future talks.

Framework Document

14. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what circumstances a referendum will be held in Northern Ireland following the consideration of the framework document.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We have undertaken to put to the electorate in Northern Ireland for approval in a referendum any agreed outcome of a three-stranded process of talks.

Explosives and Arms, Libya

15. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when was the last occasion, and in what year, Her Majesty's Government had reason to suppose that Libya-based sources supplied explosives and arms to organisations associated with the island of Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: Substantial quantities of Libyan arms and explosives reached the Provisional IRA in the mid-1980s. Their recovery has been the objective of intensive searching by the Garda in the Republic of Ireland and by the police and Army in Northern Ireland. For operational reasons it would not be appropriate to give details of the amount of arms and explosives expended and recovered.

Political Training

16. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to provide political training, political, educational and exchange programmes for young people, politicians and community groups in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The Government have no plans at present to introduce programmes on the scale and in the manner indicated by the question. The Government remain committed, however, to encouraging mutual understanding within the community wherever possible, and to assisting political and educational development among young people in Northern Ireland.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

17. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received regarding the future of the RUC since the cease-fire.

Sir John Wheeler: Since the cease-fires, Ministers and officials have continued to hold meetings with interested bodies and individuals, including district councils, political parties, community organisations and police staff associations, on a variety of issues related to the police service. Several letters have also been received, mostly from members of the public. A wide range of views has been expressed; a key note to emerge has been the welcome for debate on policing matters, especially on strengthening links between the community and the police. The Government welcome this debate and are keen to hear constructive comments and proposals.

Families against Intimidation and Terror

18. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives of Families against Intimidation and Terror.

Sir John Wheeler: The Secretary of State has had no formal meetings with representatives of FAIT. I last met representatives from this group in September 1993. Since then there have been no further meetings with Ministers but contact at official level has been maintained.

Firearms and Explosives

20. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what quantities of firearms and explosives have recently been voluntarily surrendered by Republican terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: No weaponry or equipment has been surrendered.

Inward Investment

21. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about inward investment into Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The year 1993–94 was Northern Ireland's most successful from an inward investment standpoint. The Industrial Development Board secured 13 new inward investment projects, together representing an investment potential of £259 million and 2,309 jobs.

22. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the level of inward investment to Northern Ireland since the cease-fire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The climate for investment in Northern Ireland from overseas has been greatly enhanced by a sustained absence of violence. Though it is too early to quantify the results in terms of new projects secured there are substantial indicators of heightened interest in Northern Ireland as an investment location—particularly in its primary target markets of the far east and the United States.

23. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet business leaders to discuss inward investment.

Mr. Ancram: My noble Friend Baroness Denton, the Minister for the Economy, is already heavily involved in meetings with potential inward investors. Her programme last week alone included a meeting with seventy Korean businessmen and the president of a potential Japanese investor. Baroness Denton will also meet business leaders during her visits to North America and Japan. Additionally, my noble Friend meets regularly with the business organisations in Northern Ireland.

Prisoners (Early Release)

24. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the practice with regard to the early release of prisoners.

Sir John Wheeler: There is no general practice of early release for prisoners. Those convicted by the courts and given sentences of imprisonment will serve their sentences according to the law. Individual prisoners may be released early by exercise of the royal prerogative, but this power will be used only in exceptional circumstances such as when a prisoner is terminally ill or has given assistance to the prison authorities or the police.

Trade and Economic Development

25. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to transfer responsibility for trade and economic development to a devolved assembly in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: "Frameworks for the Future" explains that, should there be agreement on the creation of new institutions in Northern Ireland, as part of a comprehensive political settlement, these will have legislative and executive responsibility over as wide a range of subject as in 1973, including those aspects of trade and economic development currently discharged by the Department of Economic Development.

Peace Process

26. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), and for Neath (Mr. Hain).

Trade Unions (Dialogue)

27. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what machinery exists for regular dialogue between Ministers and the trade unions representing workers in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: There is no formal machinery for dialogue between Ministers and the Northern Ireland trade unions. Ministers meet trade union leaders from time to time to discuss specific matters and are always ready to give favourable consideration to requests for such meetings.

Midwives

28. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on trade union rights for midwives in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: The joint council machinery, which is responsible for the implementation of Whitley council agreements in Northern Ireland, is to be abolished from 1 April 1995. As in Great Britain, the application of such agreements will be left to management and staff interests at local level.

I have met staff representatives, including the professional officers of the Royal College of Midwives, and they have been given an assurance that their organisations will continue to be recognised by all employers as representing staff on joint council terms and conditions of service. This will include those staff transferring to health and social services trusts. Such staff have their joint council terms and conditions protected.

HSS trusts are, of course, completely free to establish their own arrangements for deciding the pay and conditions of service for new staff.

Terrorists

29. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on disarming terrorist organisations.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan).

Police Reform

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to reform the police force in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: The Government published proposals last year for the reform of the framework for policing in Northern Ireland. On 15 December 1994 my right hon. and learned Friend announced that work is in hand, in continued consultation, to develop ideas for legislation.

Drugs

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations he intends to have with representatives of *(a)* the Housing Executive and *(b)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary to resolve the problem of Housing Executive dwellings being used by tenants alleged to be associated with supplying illegal substances.

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Housing Executive and the Chief Constable of the RUC. However, I have been assured that there is regular contact between the Housing Executive and the RUC and where evidence is available in relation to drugs offences, appropriate action will be taken under the criminal law to search premises, arrest offenders and bring them before the courts.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Support (Cost)

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total net cost to the Exchequer of support for agriculture and the common agricultural policy, after deducting any relevant refunds and grants received in each year since 1991; and what amount per week per family of four this net figure represents for each year since 1990–91.

Mr. Jack: Figures on total Exchequer expenditure on agricultural support within the United Kingdom, and associated receipts from the European Community budget, are available for each of the years in question in table 9.1 of the publication "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1993", a copy of which has been deposited in the Library of the House. The 1994 version will be available shortly. In addition, the UK contributes to the cost of EC-funded agricultural support in other member states through its net contributions to the EC budget. A note entitled, "The Cost of the Common Agricultural Policy to Taxpayers and Consumers", produced by my Department, was deposited in the Library of the House on 9 March. This includes details of transfers from taxpayers to farmers both in the UK and in other member states under the common agricultural policy. For the purpose of expressing costs per person or per family of four, the population of the UK is assumed to be 58 million.

Fisheries Inspectors

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the ratio of his Department's fishery inspectors to United Kingdom registered fishing vessels.

Mr. Jack: The sea fisheries inspectorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food employs 81 fisheries inspectors, based mainly at the major fishing ports in England and Wales. At end 1994, there were 10,296 UK-registered fishing vessels, of which 5,332 vessels were administered by MAFF.

Fishing

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will recommend a moratorium on all fishing in specific areas during the different spawning seasons.

Mr. Jack: On the basis of scientific advice, the common fisheries policy of the EU already contains a number of provisions, which are modified when necessary, defining areas in which fishing for certain species is prohibited or restricted for some or all of the year, in order to conserve fish stocks.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will recommend to the European Commission that it funds an educational campaign across southern Europe to inform consumers about dangers to fish stocks from the purchase of under-sized fish.

Mr. Jack: I believe that the problem, which the hon. Member rightly identifies, about the danger to fish stocks when under-sized fish are marketed, is best addressed at the point at which the problem arises. That is, when the fish are caught. It is essential that the Commission ensures that the existing provisions of the EU's common fisheries policy, which are intended to protect fish stocks and prevent the landing of under-sized fish, are rigorously enforced in all member states. I made the point to the EU Fisheries Commissioner, Signora Emma Bonino, when I met her recently.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what Britian vessels are fishing in north Atlantic waters off Canada; what vessels fished there last year; and what catch is allocated to them and by whom.

Mr. Jack: No British vessels have fished in the regulatory area of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation last year or this. The United Kingdom had a quota of three tonnes of cod in area 3NO and 1,022 tonnes of cod in area 3M in 1994. For 1995, there is a moratorium for cod 3NO. The cod quota for area 3M is 1,022 tonnes. These quotas are allocated to the United Kingdom by the Fisheries Council in accordance with relative stability.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what support Her Majesty's Government are giving to Spain in its fishing dispute with Canada;

(2) what plans he has to disassociate Her Majesty's Government from Spanish overfishing and use of prescribed nets and gear in the north Atlantic; and if he will issue a statement on the representation he is making to Canada on its fishing dispute with Spain.

Mr. Jack: In the present dispute over Greenland halibut, we are taking all the steps we can to promote a reduction in tension, avoidance of confrontational action, and an early return to negotiations to result in an equitable settlement.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what EEC controls are applied to Spanish vessels fishing the north Atlantic outside Canadian waters; what inspection of mesh sizes, gear, catch quotas and discards is applied on those fishing grounds; what control is exercised of the port of landing;

and what representations he is making to the Commission for more effective controls.

Mr. Jack: Rules of fisheries conservation and technical measures, including mesh size, minimum fish sizes, gear, catch quotas and discards, agreed in the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organization, are incorporated into EU law by the Fisheries Council. Fishing vessels may be inspected by the enforcement vessels of any NAFO contracting party operating the NAFO enforcement and controls scheme and apparent infringements are followed up by the flag state. There is an EU-funded enforcement vessel operating in the NAFO regulatory area. All Spanish and Portuguese vessels fishing in the area last year were inspected at sea on a number of occasions and all were checked at the port of landing. Any proposals for further enforcement and control measures would be considered at a meeting of the organisation.

Organochlorine

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what monitoring his Department carries out for organochlorine levels in sea birds or their eggs, and what range of chemicals has been found.

Mrs. Browning: The Department is not conducting monitoring of organochlorines in sea birds or their eggs. If any sea birds were suspected of being poisoned by OC or other pesticides, the incident would be investigated under the Department's wildlife incident investigation scheme.

Milk Quota Leasing System

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of whether the milk quota leasing system is working in the interests of the British farmer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* With the full support of the British dairy industry, the Government have sought to provide the most flexible conditions possible for producers to lease milk quota. The current leasing arrangements offer ready access to quota for those who do not have the resources to purchase quota outright or who want the flexibility to acquire extra quota as the need arises.

Marine Mammals Strandings Project

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many strandings of dolphins, porpoises or whales there have been in each year since 1990; what analysis was carried out of the carcasses; if the results are available; and how the carcasses were disposed of.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The marine mammals strandings project has recorded strandings in England and Wales since 1990 and in Scotland since January 1992. The numbers of whales, dolphins and porpoises recorded as stranded were 144 in 1990; 191 in 1991; 418 in 1992; 320 in 1993; and 360 in 1994.

Analyses of carcasses include tissue and stomach samples for studying viruses and dietary constituents. Post mortems also address contaminant levels and incidences of bycatch in fishing nets. Results are periodically published in scientific journals, and basic strandings information is recorded on a national database.

Carcasses are disposed of by a variety of methods. The decision rests with the relevant local authority.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to reviewing the Data Protection Act 1984 to permit the emergency services direct access to the databases of British Telecom and Mercury.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no plans for direct access by the emergency services to the British Telecom, Mercury and other telephone operator databases other than to the publicly available directory services.

Mrs. Sadetha Hafejee

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his letter of 6 March, ref: IMP H322601/3 (S); and PO 01835/95 to the hon. Member for Bradford West, concerning Mrs. Sadetha Mohammed Amin Hafejee, when Mr. Hafejee replied to the letter, dated 20 February, from Leeds/Bradford airport; when and where Mr. Hafejee is to be interviewed; and when is a decision to be taken on Mrs. Hafejee's application to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Mr. Hafejee replied on 28 February to Leeds/Bradford airport's letter of 20 February. As a result, an appointment has been made for Mr. Hafejee to be interviewed at 12 pm on Tuesday 21 March 1995 at the immigration office at North Shields. A record of the interview will be reported to the entry clearance officer in Bombay in the normal way. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that a decision will then be made as soon as possible.

Mrs. Quereshian Bibi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *302*, if Mr. Rahgzeb has been interviewed, to date, in relation to the application by Mrs. Quereshian Bibi—BV100/25109 and when a decision is to be taken on her application to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Mr. Rahgzeb was interviewed on 5 February. A report of the interview was sent to the entry clearance officer Islamabad on 1 March. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs that a decision on the entry clearance application will be made as soon as possible.

Turkish Special Intelligence

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what evidence he has received of links between Turkish Special Intelligence—MIT—and crimes of violence in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: It has been the long-standing practice not to comment on stories about the purported activities of domestic or overseas security and intelligence agencies.

Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will arrange for Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi to be removed from the United Kingdom on the grounds that his presence is not conducive to public order; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi, leader of the Soldiers of God, based in Pakistan, entered the United Kingdom as a visitor; for how long his visa was endorsed; and how many representations he has received from individuals and organisation in the UK protesting at Mr. Farooqi's being allowed to visit the UK.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It is not our normal practice to disclose information to third parties about an individual's immigration status. No representations have been received protesting against Mr. Farooqi's presence in the United Kingdom.

Turkish-occupied Northern Cyprus

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to seek the extradition of a Turkish citizen from Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus in connection with an attempted murder in London on 29 December 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The United Kingdom does not have any extradition arrangements with Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus.

Baglinton Airport (Policing)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost to date of the West Midlands police operation at Baglinton airport; and what is his policy on the payment for the costs of policing on private property.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that, as at 14 March, the total additional costs incurred in policing the demonstrations against live animal exports from Coventry airport were about £55,000.

Police officers are not being deployed on private property, and the question of charging does not arise since they are enforcing the peace and preventing breaches of the law.

Reconviction Rates

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the average rates of reconviction for *(a)* community *(b)* custodial sentences in each of the past 15 years.

Mr. Maclean: Comparisons between reconviction rates are affected by differences in age, sex, previous convictions and other characteristics of offenders receiving the sentences, as described in Home Office research study 136, "Explaining reconviction rates: a critical analysis". The decrease in the reconviction rate for those discharged from prison between 1987 and 1990 is partly due to the decrease in the number of young offenders discharged from prison, who have a relatively high reconviction rate.

The information is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales and Probation Statistics, England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library. The available information is as follows:

Percentage of sentenced prisoners discharged from prison or of offenders commencing probation or community service who are reconvicted within two years of discharge or commencement by year of discharge or commencement

	Custody	Probation	Community Service
1976[1]	58	—	—
1977[1]	59	—	—
1978[1]	58	—	—
1979[1]	58	41	51
1980	59	—	—
1981	58	—	—
1982	59	—	—
1983	56	—	—
1984	54	—	—
1985	52	—	—
1986	50	—	—
1987[2]	57	53	55
1988[2]	55	52	54
1989[2]	53	54	56
1990[2]	52	56	56

[1]Rates for those discharged from prison exclude those discharged from prison sentences of 3 months or less.

[2]Figures for 1987 and after are not directly comparable with those from earlier years due to a change in methodology. If the old methodology had been followed it is estimated that the reconviction rates would be about 5 to 6 percentage points lower.

Prison Service

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Prison Service staff have been used for training private prisoner custody officers; at what cost; and at whose cost, giving figures for each year since 1991 and for the latest date available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 16 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many prison service staff have been used for training private prisoner custody officers; at what cost; and at whose cost, giving figures for each year since 1991 and for the latest date available.

The information is outlined below:

1991: No training provided

1992: No training provided

1993: A total of 135 trainer days employing 9 individual trainers for varying lengths of time, all in control and restraint skills.

1994: A total of 234 trainer days employing 12 individual trainers for varying lengths of time, all in control and restraint skills.

1995: 4 prisoner custody officers attended courses run by the National Control & Restraint (Advanced) Training Centre alongside public sector colleagues.

The companies employing the officers trained were charged aggregate amounts of £40,500, £87,000 and £4,000 in 1993, 1994 and 1995 respectively for this training. These charges fully recovered the costs incurred.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Estimated expenditure on water and sewerage in the current financial year is about £8.3 million. Complete details of expenditure on these services in earlier years are not available.

Young Offenders

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-years-olds have *(a)* been cautioned and *(b)* been found guilty of any offence in each year since 1980.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of 15-year-olds cautioned and found guilty is published in the annual Command Paper "Criminal Statistics England and Wales". Table 5.21 of the 1985 edition, table 5.23 of the 1991 edition and table 5.25 of the 1993 edition refer to it. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

The 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-year-olds have been sentenced to immediate custody on their first conviction in each year since 1990; and for which offence types.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not collected routinely. A special study of a sample of those convicted of indictable offences in 1991 revealed that of 319 15-year-olds in the sample, three, 1 per cent. were sentenced to immediate custody on their first conviction for an indictable offence.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the disposals given to *(a)* 15-year-old boys and *(b)* 15-year-old girls by the youth, magistrates and Crown courts in each year since 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the following table.

The 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Number of 15-years olds sentenced for indictable offences by sex, type of disposal and type of court 1990–93

England and Wales

Year/Court	*Total sentenced*	*Absolute and conditional discharge*	*Fine*	*Supervision order*	*Attendance centre order*	*Care order*[1]	*Young Offender Institution*	*Otherwise dealt with*
Males								
1990								
Juvenile courts	5,558	1,946	845	1,173	1,144	38	306	106
Magistrates' courts	396	158	103	72	42	1	10	10
Crown Court	328	25	8	125	37	14	79	40

Number of 15-years olds sentenced for indictable offences by sex, type of disposal and type of court 1990–93

England and Wales

Year/Court	Total sentenced	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Supervision order	Attendance centre order	Care order[1]	Young Offender Institution	Otherwise dealt with
1991								
Juvenile courts	4,896	1,787	563	1,091	1,005	8	355	87
Magistrates courts	378	163	64	68	47	2	27	7
Crown Court	264	23	1	98	37	4	62	39
1992								
Juvenile/Youth courts	4,421	1,625	470	975	915	n/a	347	89
Magistrates courts	328	150	45	62	43	n/a	17	11
Crown courts	217	19	2	83	23	n/a	69	21
1993								
Youth courts	4,703	1,751	338	1,141	964	n/a	428	81
Magistrates' courts	298	137	33	57	46	n/a	19	6
Crown court	203	13	—	75	18	n/a	57	40
Females								
1990								
Juvenile courts	696	407	96	120	51	5	3	14
Magistrates' courts	56	34	13	5	1	1	1	1
Crown Court	29	6	1	14	1	2	3	2
1991								
Juvenile courts	670	372	83	122	58	5	10	20
Magistrates courts	46	26	8	7	3	—	—	2
Crown Court	27	5	3	14	1	1	2	1
1992[2]								
Juvenile/Youth courts	609	354	65	125	50	n/a	3	12
Magistrates courts	46	31	8	6	—	n/a	—	5
Crown courts	22	—	1	14	1	n/a	1	5
1993								
Youth courts	673	365	55	176	55	n/a	17	5
Magistrates' courts	36	26	5	1	3	n/a	1	—
Crown Court	17	—	—	8	—	n/a	5	4

[1] Abolished under the Children Act 1989 (14 October 1991).[2] The Youth Court was introduced from 1 October 1992.
n/a = Not applicable.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many 15-year-olds have received *(a)* one caution, *(b)* two cautions and *(c)* three or more cautions in each year since 1980.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not collected routinely. The following table shows results from special studies of those cautioned for indictable offences in one week in each of the years 1991, 1988 and 1985 in England and Wales.

Fifteen-year-olds cautioned in study week, 1991, 1988 and 1985

England and Wales *Percentages*

Number of previous cautions[1]	Year 1991	1988	1985
None	63	77	83
One	19	16	15
Two or more	18	7	2

[1]Not necessarily in the study year.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what was the length of immediate custody to which 15-year-old boys and girls were sentenced by *(a)* magistrates courts and *(b)* Crown courts in each year since 1985 broken down by the type of offence.

Mr. Maclean: As the information for 1985 to 1993 is given in a large number of tables, I shall place them in the Library.

The 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Prisons (Drug and Alcohol Programmes)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what drug or alcohol programmes are available in prisons; and what percentage of prisons have each type of programme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 16 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what drug or alcohol programmes are available; and what percentage of prisons have each type of programme.

All prisons within England and Wales provide prisoners with access to education, treatment and counselling services for substance misuse via the prison health care centre, the probation service or outside agencies and visiting self help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. A survey in December 1994 of 130 prisons found that 119 prisons provide some form of additional treatment programme. Some but not all of these facilities are already used by both alcohol and drug misusers.

The main types of treatment programme currently on offer are one-to-one counselling, group therapy and intensive treatment programmes such as therapeutic communities or the Minnesota 12-Step Programme. 78 per cent of prisons provide one-to-one counselling, 72 per cent provide group therapy and seven per cent provide intensive treatment programmes.

As part of the new Prison Service drugs strategy, expected to be published in the spring, all prison governors will be required to develop and implement local drug strategies which will form part of their contract with their area manager. The local strategies will include provision for education, treatment and throughcare for prisoners who misuse, have misused, or are at risk of misusing drugs.

Next month the Prison Service is launching the first phase of a new range of enhanced treatment services for drug misusers including: detoxification units; therapeutic communities; 3-month treatment programmes; intensive counselling and education services; and community-linked throughcare programmes. The effectiveness of the different programmes will be independently evaluated and the findings used to develop treatment programmes available to all prisoners according to their needs.

Prisons (Absconders)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners absconded from open prisons in each of the last three years; how many have been returned to prison; and how many of the absconders were convicted of drug offences.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 16 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many prisoners absconded from open prisons in each of the last three years; how many have been returned to prison; and how many of the absconders were convicted of drug offences.

The information requested is given in the following table.

Year	*Number of absconders*	*Number of absconders convicted of drug offences*
1992	1,427	44
1993	1,384	41
1994	1,300	51

The number of absconders who are either recaptured by the police or who surrender to the prison is not recorded centrally.

Prisons

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the certified normal accommodation level, population and percentage overcrowding for each local prison for the latest date available; and how many assaults on *(a)* staff and *(b)* prisoners have occurred in each prison since 1st April 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 16 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the certified normal accommodation, population and percentage overcrowding for each local prison for the latest date available; and how many assaults on (a) staff and (b) prisoners have occurred in each prison since 1st April 1994.

The information requested is given in the attached tables, copies of which have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Table 1: Certified normal accommodation, population and percentage overcrowding in local prisons on 28 February 1995

Establishment	*Certified normal accommodation*	*Population*	*Percentage overcrowding (per cent. Pop/CNA in use*
Bedford	303	298	0
Belmarsh	792	699	0
Birmingham	567	821	45
Blakenhurst	649	652	0
Bristol	464	470	1
Brixton	484	639	32
Bullingdon	644	596	0
Canterbury	184	267	45
Cardiff	321	441	37
Chelmsford	251	403	61
Doncaster	771	780	1
Dorchester	147	205	39
Durham	448	643	44
Elmley	637	627	0
Exeter	260	385	48
Gloucester	202	265	31
Highdown	629	605	0
Holme House	649	624	0
Hull	328	404	23
Leeds	814	1,066	31
Leicester	192	352	83
Lewes	312	318	2
Lincoln	444	625	41
Liverpool	973	1,274	31
Manchester	830	899	8
Norwich	333	348	5

Table 1: Certified normal accommodation, population and percentage overcrowding in local prisons on 28 February 1995

Establishment	Certified normal accommodation	Population	Percentage overcrowding (per cent. Pop/CNA in use
Pentonville	559	731	31
Preston	342	488	43
Shrewsbury	168	281	67
Swansea	151	229	52
Wandsworth	922	968	5
Winchester	261	364	39
Wolds	320	330	3
Woodhill	566	524	0
Wormwood Scrubs	714	822	15

Note:

[1]The certified normal accommodation figures used are the "in use" figures. They do not include places which are temporarily out of use, eg. because of refurbishment programmes, damaged cells, etc.

Table 2: Assaults proved at adjudication[1] on staff and prisoners in local prisons in England and Wales between April 1994–February 1995[2]

Establishment	Assaults on staff/others[3]	Assaults on prisoners	Total
Bedford	15	11	26
Belmarsh	68	26	94
Birmingham	52	36	88
Blakenhurst	75	22	97
Bristol	20	8	28
Brixton	51	25	76
Bullingdon	38	16	54
Canterbury	11	0	11
Cardiff	21	16	37
Chelmsford	22	14	36
Doncaster	120	46	166
Dorchester	2	2	4
Durham	23	13	36
Elmley	28	21	49
Exeter	5	8	13
Gloucester	10	3	13
Highdown	47	18	65
Holme House	26	9	35
Hull	55	36	91
Leeds	92	44	136
Leicester	25	17	42
Lewes	19	10	29
Lincoln	25	14	39
Liverpool	42	27	69
Manchester	44	20	64
Norwich	25	13	38
Pentonville	60	26	86
Preston	39	17	56
Shrewsbury	11	19	30
Swansea	6	6	12
Wandsworth	122	12	134
Winchester	24	12	36
Wolds	31	15	46
Woodhill	39	34	73
Wormwood Scrubs	38	16	54
Total	1,331	632	1,963

Notes:

[1]Includes attempt, incite or assist in an assault.

[2] Provisional figures.

[3] Includes prison officer grades, other staff and persons not being a member of staff.

Identity Cards

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider again the question of the introduction of compulsory identity cards as a means, inter alia, of helping those entitled to social security benefits by more effectively clamping down on fraudulent and bogus claims.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 13 October 1994 that the Government intend to publish a Green Paper on identity cards in the spring. The Green Paper will set out the options for a national identity card scheme, including whether an identity card should be voluntary or compulsory and the possible benefits of identity cards—for example in helping to combat crimes involving fraud and impersonation. Any decision on the introduction of identity cards will be made in the light of the comments we receive on this consultative document.

Pakistani Mullahs (Visas)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visas have been issued since 1990 to Pakistani mullahs to preach in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No information is available on Pakistanis citizens entering the United Kingdom as visitors who undertake preaching tours. However, since 1990, 130 visas have been issued to people applying in Islamabad, Pakistan to come to the United Kingdom for employment as ministers of religion.

Karens (Political Asylum)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Karens have been granted political asylum since 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on applications for asylum by Karens is not separately identified in the statistics. The available information relates to asylum applications by Burmese nationals and data on these, for the years 1992 to 1994, are given in the table. Figures for 1990 and 1991 are published in tables 4.1 and 4.2 respectively of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1992", issue 19/93, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Decisions on applications for asylum[1] received from nationals of Burma in the United Kingdom, excluding dependents, 1992 to 1994.

number of principal applicants

	1992	1993	1994
Asylum applications[2]	20	15	20
Decisions[2,3]	45	20	5
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	*	5	0
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[4]	40	10	5
Refused[3]	*	5	*

[1]Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5, with '*' = 1 or 2.

[2] Figures exclude information on applications made overseas.

[3]Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same year.

[4]Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.

'Refusals include those made after full consideration, refusals under para 180F for failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, and refusals on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an appropriate allowance on capping limits for 1996–97 for metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities which had already set their budget for 1995–96 before the capping limits were raised on 17 February.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Secretary of State will carefully consider this point when he comes to announce his preliminary capping criteria for 1996–97 later in the year.

Coastal Pollution

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the pupils of Canon Slade school, Bolton from whom he has received letters about pollution and the environment; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received copies of 17 letters from pupils of Canon Slade school which my hon. Friend sent him. The letters are about coastal pollution and a full reply will be sent shortly enclosing literature which we hope they will find interesting and informative.

The Government are concerned about coastal pollution and are committed to securing improvements to our coastal waters. The water industry's investment programme of some £2 billion is accomplishing a steady increase in the quality of our bathing waters—82 per cent. achieved the mandatory coliform standards of the bathing water directive last season. It is our firm intention that the programme should be completed as soon as practical constraints, such as planning procedures, permit. The bulk of the schemes will be complete by around the end of this year.

Dormice

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates have been made of the numbers and locations of the national population of dormice.

Sir Paul Beresford: The national population of dormice is estimated to be between 100,000 and 500,000. The dormouse is found in parts of England and Wales, with the strongest populations in the south of England. Counties with large populations include Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Avon, Dorset, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, east and west Sussex, Kent, Gwent, Gloucestershire and Hereford and Worcester. Scattered populations exist in Wiltshire, Hertfordshire, Shropshire, the Glamorgans, Dyfed and Powys. Isolated populations occur in Cumbria, Northumberland, Clwyd and Gwynedd. The species is apparently absent from all other English counties.

Dead Livestock

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports his Department has received in respect of dead livestock being washed up on the south coast of England in the last three years.

Sir Paul Beresford: No record can be traced of the receipt of any such reports by the Department of Environment or the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Overhead Powerlines

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what guidance his Department proposes to offer to regional electricity companies to lessen the impact of overhead powerlines; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what recent representations he has received on the impact of both health and visual matters on overhead powerlines, and if he will make a statement;

(3) what *(a)* code of practice and *(b)* other criteria have been established concerning the health and visual impact of overhead powerline as a result of planning inquiries; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what is the planning guidance to local planning authorities on planning applications for overhead powerlines; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: Responsibility for authorising overhead power lines above 20kv capacity rests with the President of the Board of Trade under the Electricity Act 1989. Guidance on this authorisation procedure, which requires consultations with local planning authorities, is published in Department of the Environment circular 14/90—Department of Energy circular 1/90—"Electricity Generating Stations and Overhead Lines". Proposals which may have a significant impact on the environment must be accompanied by an environmental statement. Each case is considered on its own merits. The President of the Board of Trade is under a duty to take environmental considerations into account in deciding whether to authorise a proposal.

Responsibility for advising on health impacts of power lines rests with the National Radiological Protection Board. I refer to my written answer of 3 November 1994, *Official Report,* column *1265.*

Atmospheric Pollution

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those district and metropolitan council areas in order of atmospheric pollution by *(a)* nitrogen dioxide, *(b)* sulphur dioxide and *(c)* particulates in the last five years in terms of annual average ground level concentrations in nanograms per cubic metre;

(2) if he will list those city and district council areas in order of atmospheric pollution by *(a)* nitrogen dioxide, *(b)* sulphur dioxide and *(c)* particulates in the last five years in terms of annual average ground level concentrations in nanograms per cubic metre.

Mr. Atkins: My Department makes measurements of NO_2, SO2 and particulates using non-automatic methods in collaboration with local authorities at over 1,200 sites for nitrogen dioxide and 257 sites for sulphur dioxide and black smoke. Data from the non-automatic sites are

published in a number of reports, as listed, which are available from the National Environmental Technology centre, Culham, Abingdon, Oxfordshire.

National NO_2 Diffusion Surveys

Cambell G. W, Stedman J. R, Stevenson K. J. A survey of NO_2 Concentrations in the UK using Diffusion Tubes, July–December 1991. Atmos Environ, 28 (3), 477–486, 1994.

Stevenson K. J, Bush T. UK Nitrogen Dioxide Survey Results for the First Year—1993 Report in preparation.

Smoke and Sulphur Dioxide Survey

UK Smoke and SO_2 Monitoring Networks: Summary Tables for 1989/90. Stevenage: Warren Spring Laboratory, 1994, Special Publication Report LR 835 (AP).

UK Smoke and SO_2 Monitoring Networks: Summary Tables for 1990/91. Stevenage: Warren Spring Laboratory 1994, Special Publication Report LR 889 (AP).

UK Smoke and SO_2 Monitoring Networks: Summary Tables for 1991/92. Stevenage: Warren Spring Laboratory 1994, Special Report LR 960 (AP).

UK Smoke and SO_2 Monitoring Networks: Summary Tables for 1992/93. Stevenage: Warren Spring Laboratory 1994, Special Publication Report LR 1007 (AP).

UK Smoke and SO_2 Monitoring Networks: Summary Tables for 1993/94. Report in preparation.

Affordable Family Homes, London

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of any surplus or shortfall of affordable family homes in London in 1998; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department does not make regional assessments of possible surpluses or shortfalls of affordable housing.

Environment Council

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 9 March.

Mr. Atkins: I represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council held in Brussels on 9 March. During the lengthy discussion on the proposed directive on integrated pollution prevention and control, I made it clear that the UK continued to welcome this proposal. I indicated that we wished to see a directive which achieved a high level of protection for the environment while providing a level playing field for industry in the UK. The subsequent debate assisted in resolving a number of issues but an overall agreement was not reached.

The Council agreed conclusions setting out the EU's position for the first conference of the parties to the UN climate change convention, building on those agreed at its meeting in December. The conclusions call for the negotiation of a protocol to the convention, setting out new targets and timetables beyond 2000 and for the agreement by all developed countries of policies and measures aimed at reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

There was a useful initial discussion of the proposals for an ambient air quality framework directive, in which I indicated UK support for measures to tackle the problems of air pollution. Discussions also took place on the proposals for the ecological quality of water and on the revision of the Seveso directive.

The Council also agreed a paper setting out the current EU position on the preparations for the third meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

British Waterways Board

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report published in January 1994 on the British Waterways Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I am pleased to report that the British Waterways Board is continuing to make good progress in implementing the Commission's recommendations. I am placing a copy of its second response in the Library of the House.

The board had already made significant progress in addressing the Commission's findings and recommendations by the time it submitted its first response in June 1994. Since then, the BWB has generally met its target for further action. A review of management systems has been completed which has identified new user requirements, including the need for new financial systems and improved management information, as well as offering opportunities for cost savings. In addition, a review of procurement procedures has also been completed. I particularly welcome the board's decision to undertake an employment review of the full range of its employment practices, taking into account the Commission's recommendations on staff appraisal and training.

The board has also taken action to promote its waterways through the launch of its "Canals Alive" marketing campaign and is undertaking more market research into demand for waterway recreation, including commissioning, jointly with the National Rivers Authority, research into demand for leisure boating.

I shall pay particular heed to the Commission's recommendations when considering with the board's strategy for the future and the criteria against which its performance should be assessed. I shall continue to take into account as appropriate the Commission's recommendations on development of BWB property, development control, the prospects for BWB securing contributions to its costs from those who benefit from its waterway activities but do not at present contribute, wayleaves and inland waterway commercial transport.

The board aims to produce its final report on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations by January 1997. I shall make a further statement when it is received.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now announce the name of the new chairman of the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Gummer: I hope to announce the name of the new chairman shortly. In the meantime I am pleased to say

that Professor Malcolm Grant, an existing member of the commission, has agreed to take on the chairmanship on an interim basis.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent or is contracted to be spent in *(a)* England and *(b)* each county in England on the public access element of the countryside stewardship scheme for the period of the scheme's existence.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Total sums spent, or contracted to be spent, on public access under countryside stewardship from 1992–93 to 2004–5 inclusive are given in the table.

County	*Total access payments and/or commitments 1992–93 to 2004–5* £
Northumberland	501,465
Cumbria	284,741
Tyne and Wear Metropolitan	14,236
Durham	127,834
Cleveland	64,763
Lancashire	152,064
Merseyside Metropolitan	1,980
Greater Manchester Metropolitan	12,720
Cheshire	22,003
North Yorkshire	967,642
West Yorkshire	13,954
Humberside	76,471
South Yorkshire	25,646
Derbyshire	257,355
Nottinghamshire	36,607
Staffordshire	25,644
Leicestershire	230,880
Hereford and Worcester	67,787
Warwickshire	87,965
Northamptonshire	435,321
Shropshire	84,402
Lincolnshire	291,896
Cambridgeshire	167,873
Norfolk	295,047
Suffolk	165,238
Bedfordshire	87,695
Oxfordshire	119, 526
Buckinghamshire	155,504
Hertfordshire	77,032
Berkshire	69,428
Greater London Metropolitan	28,031
Hampshire	110,013
Surrey	98,515
Kent	331,850
West Sussex	192,568
East Sussex	273,988
Isle of Wight	73,304
Essex	124,933
Gloucestershire	134,377
Cornwall	731,083
Devonshire	277,933
Somerset	195,164
Avon	198,657
Wiltshire	453,169
Dorset	251,012
Total	8,395,316

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Record Office

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all the current charges made to members of the public for the use of the services provided by the Public Record Office at *(a)* Chancery lane and *(b)* Kew; what plans he has to increase these charges; what new charges he intends to introduce; and when he plans to make these increases or introduce new fees.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Public Record Office is best placed to provide an answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Paul Boateng, dated 13 March 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: CHARGES FOR SERVICES

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about charges made to members of the public for the use of services provided by the Public Record Office at Kew and Chancery Lane.

The current charges are listed in the Statutory Instrument made on 6 September 1994. I enclose a copy. It applies to Kew and to Chancery Lane.

A revised Statutory Instrument is under discussion and if approved by the Lord Chancellor it is intended that it will be made so as to come into force on 1 May 1995.

Court Users Survey

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of his Department's survey last year of 4,000 court users; and when he intends to publish the results of that survey.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost of the survey is £141,438 including VAT. The report of the survey's findings will be published in April 1995.

Court Service Agency

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* other people concerning the creation of the Court Service agency; and what percentage of these representations has been (i) in favour and (ii) not in favour of its creation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others on this issue. Most have been concerned with practical considerations and have not addressed the question of the desirability or otherwise of agency status for the Court Service. In the process of working towards the launch of the Court Service as an agency, we have consulted the judiciary and a number of interested organisations including the Bar, the Law Society and the departmental trade union side. We have received responses from these organisations and have held discussions with some of them.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost of management consultancy and other professional consultancy fees will be for the launch of the Court Service agency.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The total amount of management consultancy and other professional consultancy fees incurred so far in the process of making the Court Service into an executive agency is £103,966. This amount has been spread over the two financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95. There may be a very small amount of further expenditure on consultancy fees in the remaining period leading up to the launch of the Court Service as an agency.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if there was an open and competitive selection process for the post of chief executive of the Court Service agency; and when and where this post was advertised.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Following the decision to proceed with agency status for the Court Service, the existing head of the court service was appointed in 1993 as chief executive designate, with the intention that he should continue in post to prepare the court service for establishment as an agency and to take the agency into its early stages. It is intended that the post will be subject to publicly advertised open competition not later than April 1997.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the current job title and salary of Michael Huebner; for how many years' duration is his current contract for the position of chief executive of the Court Service agency; and what his total salary will be for each of those years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: At present, Michael Huebner is grade 2 head of the court service and chief executive designate of the Court Service agency. His current salary is £73,750. On becoming chief executive of the Court Service agency, he will remain an established civil servant on the same terms and conditions of employment as at present. Any performance pay awards he receives will, however, take into account the achievement of the targets set for the Court Service. In common with other members of the proposed senior civil service, he will in due course be expected to sign a contract, as outlined in the White Paper on the civil service.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what provisions for performance-related pay on top of basic salary are contained in the contracts of *(a)* the chief executive and *(b)* other staff of the new Court Service Agency; what criteria will determine whether or not this additional pay is awarded; and what is the maximum amount each could claim under these provisions.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Staff of the Court Service, including the first chief executive, will remain as established civil servants and will not be employed within the agency on a contractual basis, with the proviso that it is intended that contracts will be introduced for the proposed senior civil service as announced in the White Paper "The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change" (CM2748).

For details of the performance pay scheme for the chief executive, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today to his question on the salary and contract of Michael Huebner. Performance pay awards to staff at grade 3 in the Court Service will continue to be made by the permanent secretary on the basis of performance against objectives and on advice from the chief executive, taking into account job weight and loading.

The pay of staff in the Court Service below grade 3 is currently determined in accordance with a number of national pay agreements negotiated by the Treasury. The provisions of these agreements are described in the "Civil Service Management Code", a copy of which is in the Library. Under the agreements staff receive pay increases in accordance with their personal performance, measured in terms of the overall "box mark" in their annual report. The maximum increases which may currently be awarded to individual staff in the main grades employed in the Court Service are as shown in the following table.

Grade	*Box Mark*	*London* £	*National* £
Grade 4	Box 1	3,786	3,786
	Box 2	3,029	3,029
	Box 3	2,272	2,272
Grade 5	Box 1	2,851	2,851
	Box 2	2,281	2,281
	Box 3	1,711	1,711
Grade 6	Box 1	2,398	2,398
	Box 2	1,918	1,918
	Box 3	1,439	1,439
Grade 7	Box 1	1,950	1,950
	Box 2	1,560	1,560
	Box 3	1,170	1,170
SEO	Box 1	1,919	1,844
	Box 2	1,478	1,419
	Box 3	832	798
HEO	Box 1	1,535	1,472
	Box 2	1,182	1,133
	Box 3	665	637
EO	Box 1	1,120	1,075
	Box 2	862	826
	Box 3	484	465
AO	Box 1	1,003	938
	Box 2	771	721
	Box 3	554	509
AA	Box 1	792	740
	Box 2	609	568
	Box 3	431	402
Bailiff	Box 1	1,062	992
	Box 2	816	763
	Box 3	576	539

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the cost of the Court Service for the current financial year; what the cost has been for each of the last five financial years; and what the planned cost of the Court Service agency will be for each of the next three years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The figures requested are set out in the table.

	£000
1989–90	396,125
1990–91	453,970
1991–92	544,626

	£000
1992–93	586,199
1993–94	581,656
1994–95	[1]598,411
1995–96	[2]627,024
1996–97	[2]632,298
1997–98	[2]632,254

[1] Estimated.

[2] Planned.

The figures showing the planned expenditure from 1995–96 onwards cannot be compared directly with the current and previous year's expenditure. The Court Service becomes an executive agency on 3 April 1995, and a number of the central functions which are currently provided by the Department's headquarters will transfer on that date to the Court Service's headquarters.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Department began paying rent on the new Court Service agency headquarters; what the yearly rent is; how long the lease is for; when Court Service staff are to move in; and what is the cost of furnishing and equipping the headquarters for its first two years of operation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Court Service headquarters will be accommodated in an office building in which the Department has leased space since 1989; two additional floors were acquired in the building in 1994. However, as part of providing a separate headquarters for the Court Service, the Department has rationalised its departmental headquarters accommodation, which will result in savings.

The rental costs of the accommodation that will ultimately be allocated to the Court Service headquarters is approximately £2 million per annum. There are several leases under which the accommodation is held, all due to expire in 2003–4.

Some of the staff who will be working in the Court Service have already moved into their proposed headquarters accommodation; the remainder, currently accommodated in buildings elsewhere on the estate, will be moved into the building as part of the on-going rationalisation process over the remaining months of this year.

The cost of furnishing and equipping the Court Service headquarters is anticipated to be minimal as staff moving into the Court Service headquarters building have taken, and will continue to take, furniture and equipment with them from their previous locations.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what office rental and other administrative savings are being made by moving Court Service staff to new Court Service agency headquarters.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The setting up of a headquarters for the Court Service has taken place at the same time as a wider rationalisation of the Lord Chancellor's Department's headquarters estate. This is anticipated to provide estimated savings of £1.8 million in 1995–96. These savings include office rental and estimated administrative costs.

TRANSPORT

M62

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has had from the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority in regard to the proposed M62 relief road; what reply he is sending; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The chairman of the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority wrote to my hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 10 February requesting an early announcement about the future of the proposed M62 relief road.

The authority was advised that on 22 June 1994 my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) announced further studies of the M62 which are now in progress. The studies are expected to take about two years to complete. The authority is among those who have been invited to assist in the work.

Roads

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many priority road building schemes due to start this year he now expects will begin construction this year.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Paul Tyler, dated 16 March 1995:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, how many priority 1 road building schemes due to start this year he now anticipates will begin construction this year.

The 'Trunk Roads in England 1994 Review' did not give a Priority to any of the schemes listed as agreed 1994/95 starts.

On 2 March 1995 Mr. Watts announced a revised target of 13 new starts this year. I expect to have awarded contracts for all these schemes by the end of the financial year.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much he estimates it will cost his Department this year to compensate house owners for the loss of value on their property due to road–building projects.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Paul Tyler, dated 16 March 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, how much he anticipates it will cost his Department this year to compensate house owners for the loss of value on their property due to road building projects.

Compensation for loss of value is not separately identified from expenditure on acquisition of property in central budgets or expenditure returns. Therefore, I am sorry that this information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the targets for progress set for priority road building schemes planned this year will now be achieved on schedule

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Paul Tyler, dated 16 March 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, how many of the targets for progress set for Priority 1 road building schemes planned this year will now be achieved on schedule.

Mr. Watts announced on 2 March a revised set of milestones for the Agency. Of the 33 milestones set for Priority 1 schemes the Agency has already met 29 and expects to meet another one before the end of the financial year. The 3 remaining schemes have been delayed to accommodate further traffic appraisal.

Newbury Bypass

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* letters and *(b)* other forms of representation he has received since 1 January (i) in favour of and (ii) against the western route bypass for Newbury, Berkshire.

Mr. Watts: Since 1 January we have received some 230 letters and 2,400 pre-printed postcards supporting the western bypass route for Newbury. Most of these came from the local Newbury area. We have also received some 220 letters opposing the western bypass route for Newbury. About half of these came from outside the local area.

RAF Northolt

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to give RAF Northolt a subsidiary passenger role in relation to Heathrow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I have no such plans. We are considering responses to last year's consultation exercise on the scope for a civil enclave for business aviation within the existing infrastructure at Northolt, and hope to make a statement on that shortly.

Airline Operators

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions United Kingdom-registered airline operators have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused permission to operate aircraft registered in countries outside the European Union.

Mr. Norris: Between 1 January and 31 December 1994 a total of 40 applications were received for the use of non-EU registered aircraft by United Kingdom airlines. Eight were for Swedish or Norwegian-registered aircraft to which the EC third aviation package applied from August 1993. These figures do not include late, short-term substitutions for aircraft which had become unserviceable due to technical problems. With one exception, all these applications were granted.

Joint Aviation Requirements

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the legal implications of the joint aviation requirements which are now being promoted by the Civil Aviation Authority; and what assessment he has made of whether they should be adopted in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: Joint aviation requirements are complex technical requirements agreed by the joint aviation authorities. There are several draft JARs currently being developed by the JAA. The Civil Aviation Authority participates fully in the development of the JARs and makes a thorough assessment of their implications. The United Kingdom will not approve a JAR unless the CAA is satisfied that it would enable the UK to maintain its very high level of aviation safety.

WALES

Civil Actions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many civil actions for damages arising from alleged medical negligence were started against each NHS trust in Wales in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not held centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was paid out in damages by each NHS trust in Wales in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the information as soon as possible. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultation he has had with the member at the European Commission responsible for regional development in relation to the calculation of European regional development fund receipts to the Welsh development agency in those financed years where no European regional development fund programme has yet been agreed;

(2) what consultation he has had with the European Commission in relation to the anticipation of European regional development fund receipts by the Welsh development agency; and what agreement he has reached as to the level of fund receipts anticipated in the agency's corporate plan; and

(3) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh development agency regarding the methods of estimating receipts from the European regional development fund to the agency in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the incidence of breast cancer in Wales and the success rate of its treatment, relative to the rest of the United Kingdom; and what plans there are to introduce stem cell removal and replacement treatment after high dose chemotherapy, with a view to its establishment as a clinical treatment for breast cancer under the national health service.

Mr. Redwood: The incidence of breast cancer in Wales is above the average for England and Wales. Information on the success rate of treatment, either in Wales or in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom, is not centrally held. The national breast screening programme, undertaken in Wales by Breast Test Wales, is enhancing the prognosis for women in the most vulnerable age group through early detection of the disease.

I am advised that high dose chemotherapy involving stem cell removal and replacement is a relatively new procedure. In some rarer tumours the technique is becoming well established but for the most common cancers, including breast cancer, treatment is advised only as part of a properly designed clinical trial.

Appointments

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, (1) if he will make a statement on the appointment of the chairmen of the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff Royal Infirmary trust and the Cardiff community healthcare trust;

(2) what information he had in relation to the political party affiliation of the successful candidates for appointment as the chairmen of the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff Royal Infirmary trust and the Cardiff community healthcare trust prior to their appointment; what account he took of it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Posts to chair the University Hospital of Wales and Cardiff Royal Group NHS trust and the Cardiff community healthcare NHS trust were advertised in the national and local press in December 1994. Both the successful candidates applied, along with over 40 others. A panel of officials chaired by the accounting officer for the NHS in Wales conducted a sift of applicants and recommended a shortlist of candidates to Ministers.

Candidates were interviewed before appointments were made. The Welsh Officer does not seek information about the political affiliations of candidates for public appointment, as it is not relevant.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for appointing a chairman to the vacant post of chairman of Bridgend and District NHS trust.

Mr. Redwood: I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Morriston Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral statement of 2 March, *Official Report*, column 1281, to the Morriston hospital cardiac surgery unit, what is his current estimate of capital expenditure on the unit during *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97.

Mr. Redwood: This is a matter for the Morriston NHS trust which has not yet determined the profile of capital expenditure.

Browning Ferris plc

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors he will take into account in considering the award of an operating licence to Browning Ferris plc in Newport; and when he expects to announce his decision.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend's principal concern is to establish whether the plant can be operated without pollution of water or danger to public health. In determining this, he will take account of all relevant factors. His decision will be announced as soon as possible.

Housing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the United Nation's Target 2000 housing strategy; and if he will make a statement on how his Department is seeking to meet this target.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Federation of Housing referred to the target in a report which it discussed with me in January. The Government's aims and objectives for housing in Wales are set out in "An Agenda for Action", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what clawback arrangements will apply to the payment of a derelict land clearance grant for land reclamation and asbestos removal at the Blue Circle site at Rhoose; when Blue Circle Industries acquired the site; on what date it first enquired about derelict land clearance grants to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Welsh development agency; and what consultations there have been with the two relevant local authorities concerning the after-use of the site.

Mr. Redwood: The administration of the land reclamation programme in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh development agency. I have, therefore, asked the chief executive of the agency to write to the hon. Member and will arrange for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

General Practitioner Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients were removed from the treatment lists of their general practitioners in 1990 and in each of the succeeding years.

Mr. Richards: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of *(a)* the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and *(b)* the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the repayment of part of the grant paid to Grosvenor Waterside plc for the development of Crickhowell house in cognisance of (i) roof leaks, (ii) wall leaks, (iii) window leaks and (iv) basement leaks in Crickhowell house; and what notification his Department has had of negotiations in relation to such building defects.

Mr. Redwood: None. Any building defect is a matter for Grosvenor Waterside to resolve with the parties responsible for the design and construction of the building.

Crown Buildings

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the installation work being

carried out in that section of the Crown Buildings, Cathays park occupied by the information technology branch of NCM Ltd. prior to its transfer to Llanishen.

Mr. Redwood: NCM is carrying out some preparatory work for its move from Cathays park.

Cash Limits

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for changes to the local authority capital—WO/LACAP—and Housing for Wales—WO/HFW—cash limits for his Department in the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: The cash limit for WO/LACAP will be reduced by £5,437,000 from £490,215,000 to £484,778,000 and the cash limit for WO/HFW will be increased correspondingly by £5,437,000 from £120,740,000 to £126,177,000.

These changes reflect a transfer a provision from local authorities to Housing for Wales which enables housing associations to provide additional housing units.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Internal Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security pursuant to his answer of 22nd February, *Official Report*, column *245*, if he will give details of the charges made against the 16 staff of his Department prosecuted for fraud and the outcome of the legal actions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since 1 April 1994, 34 staff have been prosecuted for matters relating to benefit fraud. The charges and results of the prosecutions are:

Case No.	*Charges*	*Outcome*
1	Theft and deception	Awaiting trial
2	Deception	Awaiting trial
3	Deception	Awaiting trial
4	Deception	Warrant out for arrest
5	Deception	Awaiting trial
6	Deception	Awaiting trial
7	Deception	Adjourned
8	Deception	Final hearing awaited
9	Deception	Awaiting trial
10	Deception	Warrant out for arrest
11	Deception	Conditional discharge
12	Deception	Awaiting trial
13	Deception	£110 fine and £120 costs
14	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
15	Aiding and Abetting	£150 fine and £30 costs
16	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
17	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
18	Conspiracy to defraud	Discharged
19	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
20	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
21	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
22	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
23	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
24	Conspiracy to defraud	Two years imprisonment
25	Conspiracy to defraud	Adjourned
26	Conspiracy to defraud and deception	Awaiting trial
27	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
28	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
29	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
30	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
31	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
32	Conspiracy to defraud	Awaiting trial
33	Theft and deception	9 months imprisonment
34	Theft and false accounting	Awaiting trial

Residential Care Homes

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when he proposes to revise the fees available for retirement pensioners in residential homes to meet the actual costs of the accommodation and services provided;

(2) if he will identify his expectations of the liability of the state for retirement pensioners living in residential homes after their assets had run out in each year up to 2002;

(3) if he will estimate the additional cost to public funds at current rates, if his Department matched the real costs met by retirement pensioners in residential homes.

Mr. Roger Evans: I infer that these questions are about the higher levels of income support, which are available to people living in residential care and nursing homes on 31 March 1993 with preserved rights. These range between £194 and £262 for residential care homes and £290 and £325 for nursing homes with higher amounts available in London.

All income support limits are reviewed each year taking account of a variety of available information as well as representations from interested parties. Any extra help is targeted within available resources at specific groups where the need is greatest. All the limits will be increased in April. It has never been the intention to meet all fees, however high they may be set. That would be an unrealistic commitment.

We will continue to look carefully at these amounts each year as part of the uprating exercise. Any increases which result from that uprating will apply equally to people living in registered residential care homes on 31 March 1993 who were self-supporting at that time but who need to claim income support at a later date when their assets run out. Forecasts about the state's liability are not appropriate in these circumstances.

The estimated additional cost to public funds if the Department were the meet the full costs charged to people above pension age in residential care homes would be £56 million and for those in nursing homes £79 million. These figures are based on the February 1994 income support quarterly statistical inquiry, and reflect the limits in payment at that time. The figures assume that homeowners do not make further increases in charges.

Residential Care and Nursing Homes

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the aggregate spending of his Department on residential and nursing home care in the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated annual expenditure for those in residential care and nursing homes in receipt of income support including other social security pensions and benefits taken into account, for 1992-93 was £3.05 billion.

Source:
Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry, May 1992.

Expenditure (Water and Sewerage)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Hague: The information requested for the current year is available only for the period up to and including 31 January 1995.

Period	*Departmental costs*
1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	2,788,734
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	3,081,113
1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994	2,852,609
1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995	2,409,267

Mullahs

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Secuirty if he will make a statement on the entitlement to benefits of Pakistani mullahs who have been issued visas to preach in mosques in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Roger Evans: Visiting mullahs are admitted to the United Kingdom under the immigration rules for up to six months as a visitor on the understanding that they do not become a charge on public funds. They are not entitled to income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit. They would not be entitled to contributory benefits because they would not have paid British national insurance contributions.

Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost and how many individuals would be successful in claims of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* sickness benefit and *(c)* invalidity benefit through qualification of sickness benefit if the pre-1988 contribution rules were re-established.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 3 March 1995]:* The estimated cost and caseload increases of restoring the pre-1988 contribution conditions are given in the tables:

Table 1: Effects of restoration of pre-1988 National Insurance contribution conditions on claims to and cost of unemployment benefit

Gross cost (£million)	115
Net cost (£million)	20
Increase in unemployment benefit recipients	45,000

Notes:
The following assumptions have been made:
1. Costs have been rounded to the nearest £5 million and caseloads to the nearest 5,000.
2. Calculations are based on an unemployment benefit caseload of 500,000.
3. Calculations have been based on data taken from the 1992–93 National Insurance Recording System data-base, the 1993 Annual Statistical Enquiry and the 1990/91/92 Family Expenditure Surveys, updated to 1994–95 prices and benefit levels.
4. Some people who would satisfy revised contribution conditions may be disallowed, or disqualified for, unemployment benefit on other grounds (eg leaving work voluntarily, misconduct, compensation from an employer).
5. The figures are an under-estimate as no allowance can be made for people who sign as unemployed for the first time as s result of the change in contribution conditions.

Table 2: Effects of restoration of pre-1988 National Insurance contribution conditions on claims to and cost of incapacity benefit

Long-run gross cost (£ million)	500
Long-run net cost (£ million)	100
Estimated number of successful new Short-term (lower rate) Incapacity Benefit claims (per annum)	50,000
Long run increase in number of longer term Incapacity Benefit recipients	100,000

Notes:
1. "Longer term incapacity benefit" means those receiving short-term (higher rate) and long-term incapacity benefit.
The following assumptions have been made:
1. Costs have been rounded to the nearest £50 million and caseloads to the nearest 50,000.
2. Calculations have been based on data taken from the 1992–93 National Insurance Recording System data-base, and the 1993 Annual Statistical Enquiry, uprated to 1994–95 prices and benefit levels.
3. New entitlements come from either the current severe disablement allowance caseload or from those, registering as sick, who are less than 80 per cent. disabled and who currently have insufficient contributions.
4. Allowance has been made of the effect of the incapacity benefit changes and the expected effect of the new medical test on the long-term Incapacity Benefit caseload.
5. The new contribution conditions for the lower rate of short-term incapacity benefit are assumed to apply to long-term incapacity benefit. This means that all those who get lower rate of short-term incapacity benefit will move onto long-term incapacity benefit as long as their incapacity continues.
6. The figures are an under-estimate as no allowance can be made for people registering as sick for the first time as a result of the change in the contribution conditions.
7. These estimates are highly uncertain and should be treated with extreme caution.

Social Fund

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the net value after repayment of loans of the social fund budget for 1994–95; and what percentage this was of the net value of the social fund budget for 1988–89.

Mr. Roger Evans: The net value of the social fund discretionary budget in 1994–95 was £140 million. This is equivalent to 112 per cent. of the net social fund discretionary budget of £125 million for 1988–89.

The improved recovery of loans means that over this period the gross discretionary budget increased from £203 million to £368 million, an increase of over 81 per cent. The recycling of loans has allowed more people to get more help while protecting the public purse.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current total number of staff employed by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)

by Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive on 7 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *165*.

Appointments

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he intends to appoint a new chairman of the social security advisory committee.

Mr. Lilley: The current chairman of the social security advisory committee, Mr. Michael Bett, will be giving up his post following his appointment as First Civil Service Commissioner. He has agreed to continue as chairman until a suitable successor is found. I shall be advertising the post nationally.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the statutory sick pay entitlement for individuals undertaking the Government's youth training scheme.

Mr. Hague: For trainees who have employed status and are paid wages by their employer while on youth training, entitlement to statutory sick pay is assessed on the same basis as for any other employee employed under a contract of service. The remaining trainees, who have non-employed or self-employed status and receive a training allowance, are excluded from entitlement to SSP.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants received sums for income support for mortgage interest under the deserted partners rule allowing interest on normally ineligible loans to be paid to the remaining partner, in 1994–95 and in each of the five preceeding years;

(2) what was the average expenditure on income support for mortgage interest for each claimant who received a payment of income support for mortgage interest under the deserted partner rule in 1994–95 and in each year of the five preceeding years;

(3) what was the total expenditure on income support for mortgage interest under the deserted partner rule in 1994–95 and in each of the five preceeding years; and what percentage of total expenditure on income support for mortgage interest it represented in each of these years.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information collected on income support mortgage interest paid to claimants does not differentiate the amounts paid for otherwise ineligible loans. The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the methods by which his Department is monitoring the outcomes of the appeals made by British nationals who are refused income support because they have failed to satisfy the habitual residence test.

Mr. Roger Evans: The independent tribunal service identifies appeals according to the benefit involved at the appeals tribunal stage but does not categorise the reason for each appeal.

School Meals

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of extending access to free school meals to children whose parents are in receipt of family credit.

Mr. Roger Evans: Around £120 million a year.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the back-to-work bonus under the jobseeker's allowance will affect claims for *(a)* family credit and *(b)* housing benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: The back-to-work bonus will be treated as capital for the purposes of claims to income-related benefits. Bonus payments made to people who move from jobseeker's allowance or income support into work and claim family credit and housing benefit will be disregarded as capital for 52 weeks from date of receipt.

Where a claimant returns to income-based jobseekers allowance or income support after claiming the bonus, the payment will be taken fully into account in assessing the claimant's capital resources. Any person qualifying for these benefits will continue to be entitled to maximum help with rent as now.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the total cost to each local authority in England and Wales of making payments to housing benefit claimants under regulation 11 to the Housing Benefit General Regulations and in each year since 1988–89.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The available information has been placed in the Library.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many officials of his Department in each of the last 30 years have been prosecuted for making fraudulent benefit claims.

Mr. Arbuthnot *[pursuant to his reply, 22 February 1995,* c. *245]:* I regret that the information provided was incorrect. The correct information is as follows.

The figures requested are not available for any of the past 30 years. However, the Benefits Agency recently conducted a special survey to ascertain how many staff were prosecuted for benefit fraud, including instrument of payment fraud and benefit fraud where the member of staff was involved in fraudulent benefit claims by others, since 1 April 1994. There were 34 such prosecutions.

HEALTH

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of her Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Sackville: Following the splitting of the Department of Health from the Department of Social

Security, expenditure on water and sewerage was not separately recorded from expenditure on other utilities. Information for 1991–92 is therefore not available. Expenditure by the Department in subsequent years is shown in the table. The figures include expenditure by the Department's agencies with the exception of the NHS Estates agency. The landlord of the building occupied by NHS Estates levies a single, fixed service charge, and does not separately bill the agency for water and sewerage.

1992–93: £334,920[1]
1993–94: £102,233
1994–95[2]: £66,120

[1] This figure included overpayment in respect of the London estate, as a result of which expenditure in subsequent years has been reduced.
[2] Year to date.

NHS Complaints

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she now expects to announce the Government's response to the review of the national health service complaints system.

Mr. Malone: Shortly.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of complaints about the NHS in each of the last three years.

Mr. Malone: The latest information available about numbers of complaints about the national health service are shown in the tables. The rise can be attributed to the increase of patient awareness and confidence due to the patients charter.

Family Health Services: Number of complaints investigated formally:
1991: 2,205
1992: 1,974
1993: 2,520

Hospital Complaints:
1990–91: 37,350
1991–92: 51,130
1992–93: 58,443*Notes:*
1. Information for 1994 for family health services will be available in the autumn, and will be contained in "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics", copies of which are routinely placed in the Library.
2. Information on hospital complaints for 1993–94 will be available shortly.

NHS Administration

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on any aspects of NHS administration that arise from the necessity to transfer an accident victim in Orpington to Leeds Royal infirmary.

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for identifying health care needs rests with the local health authorities who, together with local providers, should ensure there is sufficient provision. The South Thames region of the national health service executive is conducting a full investigation.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has to indicate how widespread is the practice of consultants refusing to accept on to their waiting lists patients referred by GPs for non-urgent operations on the basis that this would extend the waiting lists beyond Government guidelines of acceptability.

Mr. Malone: None.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the present waiting lists for hospitals in the borough of Barnet; and if she will estimate what she expects them to be in 1997.

Mr. Malone: Barnet General and Edgware General hospitals are both managed by the Wellhouse national health service trust. At 30 September 1994, there were 5,671 patients waiting for in-patient or day case treatment at the trust, of whom none were waiting more than 18 months. I expect further progress to be made in reducing waiting times at the trust.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were caused by solvent abuse *(a)* in Lancashire, *(b)* in the north-west and *(c)* in the United Kingdom in respect of those aged (i) under 16, (ii) 16 to 24 and (iii) 25 years and over for the years 1990 to 1995.

Mr. Bowis: The information for the last five years available is shown in the table:

Age	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Lancashire			
Under 16	2	0	2
16–24	3	1	1
25 + over	0	0	0
North West			
Under 16	6	2	5
16–24	9	8	8
25 + over	1	3	1
United Kingdom			
Under 16	47	44	19
16–24	98	55	45
25 + over	6	22	15
Total	151	121	79

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what price increase the London ambulance service is imposing for its emergency service; how much extra each London district health authority will have to pay; what choice they have about paying it; what considerations have caused the Government not to pay directly to rectify any problems in the emergency service in respect of the London ambulance service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It is for district health authorities in London and the London ambulance service to agree contracts.

Private Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to NHS trust hospitals directly from *(a)* private hospitals and *(b)* private beds in NHS hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many finished consultant episodes there were on private patients in NHS facilities in each of the last four years *(a)* in total, *(b)* by region and *(c)* by district health authority.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested in total and by region is published in "Hospital Episodes Statistics, Volume 1"; copies for the four latest years of published data to 1992–93 are available in the Library. The corresponding information by district health authority is not available centrally.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the income from private patient activity in each NHS trust and directly managed unit for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 13 January, columns *267–68*.

Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *355-56*, if she will list the health statistics in the categories in the answer for the top five district health authorities or family health service authorities as appropriate.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

a) the five district health authorities with the highest crude birth rates in 1993 were:

	Crude birth rate[1]
East London and City	19.3
West Birmingham	18.2
East Birmingham	17.9
North Manchester	17.3
South East London	16.7
England	13.1

[1] Number of births per 1,000 population of all ages.

b) The five local authority areas in England with the highest number of notifications of tuberculosis in 1993 were:

	Notifications of tuberculosis
Birmingham	319
Bradford	164
Leicester	162
Newham	137
Brent	129

Data for district health authorities are not available.

c) The five district health authorities with the highest conception rates to women under 20 in England, 1991, were:

	Conception rates[1]
North Manchester	139.2
City and Hackney	113.9
West Lambeth	112.4
Tower Hamlets	111.4
East Birmingham	105.5
England	64.8

[1] All conceptions to women under 20 per 1,000 females aged 15-19.

d) Residents of three health districts accounted for 35 per cent. of all AIDS notifications in England and Wales in 1993. The districts were:

Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
Camden and Islington
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow

e) The six district health authorities in England with the highest rates of perinatal mortality[1] in 1993 were:

	Perinatal mortality rates
West Birmingham	14.9
South Birmingham	14.1
Central Manchester	13.8
Gateshead	13.3
South Manchester	13.2
Worcester and District	13.2

[1] Per 1,000 live and still births

Clinical Services

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which clinical and clinical support services which have been market tested are now *(a)* viewed as suitable for privatisation in the future or *(b)* available for tender to private contractors in 1994–95.

Mr. Sackville: None—contracts for clinical and clinical support services awarded as a result of a market testing exercise remain national health service contracts whether they are won in-house or by another public or private contractor. At the end of the relevant contract period, they will again be subject to fresh market testing under NHS arrangements.

We have been advised of local plans to market test some 20 clinical and clinical support services for 1994–95.

Long-Term Care

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters were received from individuals and from organisations concerning the draft guidance on long-term care of the elderly; and how many were opposed to the Department's proposals.

Mr. Bowis: A total of 182 responses were received from both individuals and organisations in response to our invitation for comments on the draft guidance on NHS responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs. We considered very carefully the range of views expressed on the draft guidance in finalising HSG(95)8/LAC(95)5, which was issued on 23 February 1995. Copies are available in the Library. The guidance has been widely welcomed.

Hospital Staff (Recruitment)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent by her Department, NHSE, district health authorities and trusts on recruiting hospital staff from overseas in each of the last three years.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Market Testing

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to her Department and the NHS

of management consultants advising on market testing of *(a)* clinical and clinical support services and *(b)* other NHS services.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health and national health service summary accounts do not separately record expenditure on management consultancy advice for market testing issues.

Consultancy

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost estimated by the Audit Commission or her Department on management consultants by her Department, NHSE, regional Health authorities, district health authorities, family health service authorities, trusts and general practitioner fundholders in the last three years.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health and the national health service executive, however, have spent the following amounts from running costs on consultancy in the last three years;

1991–92: £24,258,000
1992–93: £18,399,000
1993–94: £15,933,037

Information is not available centrally about expenditure on management consultants by regional health authorities, district health authorities, family health services authorities, trust and general practitioner fundholders.

Operation Cancellations

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many operations were cancelled on the day of or after the date the patient was due to be admitted to hospital by regional health authority, district health authority and in total; and how many were not re-admitted with one month during each quarter since March 1993.

Mr. Malone: This information was not collected in the form requested until April 1994 when the national patients charter standard on cancelled operations was improved so that a patient whose operation is cancelled for non-medical reasons on the day of, or after, admission is admitted for treatment within one month of the first cancellation. The information from 1 April 1994 will be placed in the Library. Performance against this patients charter standard is being kept under review.

Waiting Times

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each regional office the latest waiting times for each fundholder procedure for *(a)* patients funded by health authorities and *(b)* patients funded by general practitioner fundholders.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

GP Fundholding

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what was the total amount of savings made by fundholders in the last three years.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 24 November 1994, columns *321-22* and on 14 March, column *545*.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if she will give the aggregate level of savings by fundholding general practitioners in each family health service authority for the years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what was the number of general practitioner fundholding practices and the amount of savings *(a)* by family health service authority and *(b)* in total for (i) 1991–92, (ii) 1992–93 and (iii) 1993–94.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 15 March for information on the number of general practitioner fundholding practices.

I refer the right hon. and hon. Members, to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 24 November 1994, columns *321-22* which provides information on fundholder savings at regional health authority level in 1991–92 and 1992–93. Information on fundholder savings at family health services authority level for these years is not available centrally.

The requested information on fundholder savings for 1993–94 will be placed in the Library. Nationally, retained savings in 1993–94 equalled £64.2 million, about 3.5 per cent. of budgets set—similar to the levels of efficiency savings made by fundholders in the first two years of the scheme.

Savings may be spent only after external audit of the fundholding account by the Audit Commission. Fundholder savings are held by FHSAs on behalf of the patients of fundholders and may be retained for up to four years. With the agreement of the regional health authority, savings may be used for the benefit of patients of the practice as outlined in the practice's annual business plan.

Special Hospitals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what difficulties she has identified in integrating special hospitals into the internal market; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what are her plans regarding the status of special hospitals; what is the timescale for changes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on 3 February, column *872*.

Edgware

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis the present capitation formula for Edgware is calculated; and what evidence she has on whether the census figures for 1991 still represent the true picture in the case of the London borough of Barnet.

Mr. Sackville: For 1995–96, the modified national weighted capitation formula has been used to set targets for regional health authorities. It is for North Thames RHA to determine both its own sub-regional formula and how much funding is to be made available to its district health authorities. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Staveley, the chairman of North Thames regional health authority.

The population base used for revenue resource allocation is the mid-year sub-national population

projections, that is mid-1995 for 1995–96. These are currently based on the 1991 census, however, they do take account of assumed rates of births, deaths and migration since 1991.

Minor Accident Treatment Service Units

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the minimum number of staff at any one time at a minor accident treatment service unit: what is the level of qualification of those staff; and whether it is part of their responsibility to diagnose acute medical conditions.

Mr. Sackville: These aspects are determined by individual hospital trusts according to local needs.

Grading Appeals

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will estimate how long it will take until all the outstanding nurses' grading appeals have been heard; and what steps she is taking to speed up the waiting times;

(2) how many nurses' grading appeals have not been heard; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: At 1 March 1995, there were just over 2,500 nurse grading appeals in England which were still unresolved. This is about half of the number outstanding a year ago. The Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council is operating an agreed appeals mechanism for clearing all outstanding appeals. The aim is for all appeals to be cleared by 31 December 1995.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses' grading appeals have been conducted since 1988; and how many were outstanding in each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1988, approximately 98,000 nurse clinical grading appeals have been heard. Information on the number of appeals outstanding at the end of the last three years is shown in the table. Comparable information is not available for 1990 and 1991.

Outstanding nurses and midwives clinical grading appeals (England)

Year ending	*Number of appeals outstanding*
31 December 1992	21,326
31 December 1993	4,819
31 December 1994	2,964

The aim is for all appeals to be cleared by 31 December 1995.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to secure the financial future of NHS trusts against medical negligence claims; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The management of medical negligence claims is a matter for individual trusts. At present, where a trust has, in any financial year, to pay claims with a total value in excess of 0.5 per cent. of its turnover, the trust may apply to the national health service executive for a loan in order to spread the cost of meeting the claims. A scheme is being developed under section 21 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 for trusts to pool the financial liabilities arising out of clinical negligence. Discussions are continuing on the details of the proposals and if trusts are sufficiently supportive, the scheme is likely to be introduced in 1995–96 on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was paid out in damages by each NHS trust in England in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many civil actions for damages arising from alleged medical negligence were started against each NHS trust in England in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the current *(a)* chairs and *(b)* non-executive directors of each trust board by region, indicating the gender and occupation of each individual.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* The latest information available centrally will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those trust boards that currently have vacancies for chairs and non-executive directors; and whether the posts will be filled under the new appointments regime.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him earlier, for details of vacancies on the boards of national health service trusts. All appointments made after 1 April will be in accordance with new guidelines on appointments procedures.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the current *(a)* chairs and *(b)* non-executive directors of each trust board by region, indicating the gender and occupation of each individual.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* The latest information available centrally will be placed in the Library.

Immunisation and Cancer Screening

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the effect of the GP contract on immunisation and cancer screening services.

Mr. Malone: When the new general practitioner contract was introduced in 1990, 89 per cent. of GPs met targets for childhood immunisation and 86 per cent. for cancer screening. By April 1993, this had increased to 96 per cent. of GPs meeting childhood immunisation targets and 98 per cent. cancer screening targets. This shows clearly the positive impact of the GP contract on these services.

Chemotherapy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what NHS trials are being conducted of treatment for breast cancer involving the removal and replacement of stem cells after high dose chemotherapy analogous to recent trials in the United States of America; and what plans she has to make this treatment available under the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 15 March, *Official Report,* column *549.*

NHS Accountants

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accountants were employed within all sections of the NHS in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Malone: In the years 1991 to 1994, the years for which information is available, some 1,463, 1,701, 2,176 and 2,174 staff in the national health service were recorded as holding qualifications recognised by the consultative committee of the accounting bodies.

GP Lists

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 December, *Official Report,* column *400,* when she will publish data for 1993 on patients removed from general practitioners' lists.

Mr. Malone: Information for all family health services authorities for 1993–94 is not yet available.

Pinderfields Hospital

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will seek reports regarding the future of Pinderfields hospital, Wakefield from *(a)* the chair of the Yorkshire and Northern health region, *(b)* the chair of the Wakefield health authority and *(c)* the chair of the Pinderfields trust; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Wakefield Healthcare. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Brian Hayward, chairman of Wakefield Healthcare, for details.

Form FP10

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total estimated cost of printing and distributing the amended form FP10 required to be available as from 1 April next; what was the total cost of printing and distributing the forms that the amended FP10 will replace; and what representations she has received from professional bodies about the lack of consultation over the design and content of amended FP10 prior to printing.

Mr. Malone: No new costs have been incurred by introducing a revised print of form FP10. At about £1.38 million, the costs of printing and distributing the forms for 1995–96 are expected to be some 11 per cent. higher than in 1994–95 because of a rise in the cost of paper.

Representations have been received from the General Medical Services Committee of the British Medical Association and the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee with whom there are on-going consultations about the new arrangements.

NHS Supplies Contracts

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total value of contracts placed by the NHS Supplies Authority for cash registers and other accounting devices in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Sackville: The National Health Service Supplies Authority was set up in October 1991, and has no specific contracts for cash registers or accounting devices.

Emergency Admissions

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the change in emergency admissions to hospital by regional health authority and in total for each quarter of 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The table shows numbers of non-elective admissions in the general and acute specialties for each regional health authority in England and in total, using information collected by the national health service executive.

For England as a whole, the national proportion of non-elective admissions in relation to total admissions has remained at about 47 per cent. for all the period.

Non-elective admissions (general and acute) by region and quarter 1993–94 to 1994–95: England finished consultant episodes

Thousand

	1993–94				*1994–95*		
Region[1]	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*
Northern and Yorkshire	144	149	158	154	145	145	153
Trent	93	89	98	96	97	96	102
Anglia and Oxford	88	91	96	95	95	93	95
North Thames	113	123	127	128	128	134	136
South Thames	116	116	125	116	119	118	123
South and West	118	125	124	126	124	125	130
West Midlands	104	100	109	106	102	106	111
North West	144	144	158	150	150	154	161
England	918	937	994	971	961	972	1,010

[1] The table shows admissions in each region not including data from the special health authorities.

DEFENCE

Nerve Agents

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GB at the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall; what quantities of nerve agent GB were used at this research; when the results of this research were shared with other countries; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GB at the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall; what quantities of nerve agent GB were used at this research; when the results of this research were shared with other countries; and under which Defence Agreements these results were exchanged, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The research work carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Nancekuke involving the nerve agent GB focused on the following:

(a) Developing a specification for the materials used in the preparation process.

(b) To study the impurities and by-products found in the GB product.

(c) To examine alternative preparation processes and to compare the differences in the GB product.

(d) To study the amount of GB in the by-products from the preparations.

(e) To investigate the storage of GB.

(f) To study the corrosion properties of materials used in the construction of the GB preparation facility.

4. During the period 1951–1956 some 20 tonnes of GB were produced. Most of this was used in the storage studies and then subsequently destroyed.

5. After 1956 some research on the stability of GB continued until 1979 when the Chemical Defence Establishment at Nancekuke closed. The results of the research and studies into GB were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Cooperation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *888*, what was the conclusion of the studies to find out if it was easier to produce the nerve agent GE than the nerve agent GB; in which years these studies were carried out; and when the results of these studies were exchanged with Canada and the United States of America under the tripartite conferences on toxicological warfare.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 3 February, Official Report, column 888, what was the conclusion of the studies to find out if it was easier to produce the nerve agent GE than the nerve agent GB; in which years these studies were carried out; and when the results of these studies were exchanged with Canada and the United States of America under the Tripartite Conferences on Toxicological Warfare, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The studies to determine whether it was easier to produce the nerve agent GE rather than the nerve agent GB confirmed that this was not the case. Earlier studies had suggested that the phosphorus intermediate ethyl derivative was simpler to synthesise but when alternative processes were explored it was found that the primary intermediates for GB (methylphosphonic difluoride and methylphosphonic dichloride) could be more readily produced.

4. These studies took place during the late 1940s and early 1950s and the exchange of this data with the USA and Canada under the Tripartite Conferences would have taken place during this period.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the names of the experiments carried out by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment on service volunteers with the incapacitating agent BZ since 1965; in which years each of these experiments took place; how many service volunteers were involved; what was the nature of these experiments; what were the conclusions of these studies; and what follow-up checks were conducted on these service volunteers in the years after they left Porton Down to monitor the long-term effect of the experiments on their mental and physical health.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what were the names of the experiments carried out by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment on Service volunteers with the incapacitating agent BZ since 1965; in which years each of these experiments took place; how many Service volunteers were involved; what was the nature of these experiments; what were the conclusions of these studies; and what follow-up checks were conducted on these Service volunteers in the years after they left Porton Down to monitor the long-term effect of the experiments on their mental and physical health, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. This work includes the evaluation of the potential hazard of possible agents such as the incapacitating agent BZ.

3. Studies involving Service volunteers and BZ since 1965 were not given a specific operational name. Our records indicate that 4 Service volunteers were given BZ between 1965 and 1967. No studies involving Service volunteers have taken place since 1967.

4. The purpose of the studies was to assess the effects of a potential agent which might affect the volunteers' behaviour. The conclusion of the evaluation of BZ was that it could affect the behaviour of Service personnel and as such presented a potential hazard which should not be ignored in considering the potential hazards to which UK Forces might be exposed.

5. The volunteers were examined before and after the tests by the resident Army psychiatrist and no indication of any continuing effect was observed. There have been no reports of any subsequent sequelae from any of the volunteers .

Service volunteers return to their units on completion of the study, where they are, medically, the responsibility of the unit Medical Officer. There is no history of Service doctors in their units seeking advice from CBDE Porton Down on any subsequent illnesses that may have been reported by volunteers who have been exposed to agent during studies at CBDE.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, columns *887–88*, in which scientific journals the results of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's studies on nerve agent pre-treatment sets were published; when NAPS was first issued for use by the armed forces; in which years the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries; and under which defence agreement these results were shared.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 3 February, Official Report, columns 887–8, in which scientific journals the results of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's studies on NAPS were published; when NAPS was first issued for use by the Armed Forces; in which years the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries; and under which Defence Agreement these results were shared, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. Our records indicate that the results of our studies on NAPS were published in the following scientific journals:

a. Fundamentals of Applied Toxicology.

b. Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology.

c. Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology.

4. NAPS was first issued for use by the Armed Forces following its acceptance into service in August 1981.

5. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with our Allies under the agreements covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment such as those listed by the Rt Hon Archie Hamilton in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, column 255–256.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been carried out on the nerve agent VX at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since the closure of the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke; what quantity of the nerve agent VX has been used in this research at Porton Down; when the results of this research were exchanged with other countries; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged.

Mr. Freeman : This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what research has been carried out on the nerve agent VX at the Chemical and Biological Establishment at Porton Down since the closure of the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke; what quantity of the nerve agent VX has been used in this research at Porton Down; when the results of this research were exchanged with other countries; and under which Defence Agreements these results were exchanged, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Since the closure of the Chemical Defence Establishment at Nancekuke in 1980 research on VX has covered all aspects concerned with the provision of effective protective measures against the threat that VX might be used by an aggressor against the UK Armed Forces. This has included hazard assessment, detection and identification, physical protection, contamination control and the use of prophylactic and medical countermeasures. Our records are not maintained in such a way as to readily identify the quantity of VX used since 1980. However, the quantity of VX used in research at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment from 1985 to the present day is about 1.25 Kgs.

4. The results of this work were part of the chemical biological defence programme and have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with our allies under the agreements covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment such as those listed by the right hon. Archie Hamilton in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255-256.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1176-77*, why the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment felt it necessary to carry out further studies on the nerve agent pretreatment set at the Cambridge military hospital in 1993.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 20 December, Official Report, columns 1176–7, why the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment felt it necessary to carry out further studies on the Nerve Agent Pretreatment Set at the Cambridge Military Hospital in 1993, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and,

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3 The Nerve Agent Pretreatment Set (NAPS) was developed in response to a requirement which called for a pretreatment effective against poisoning by all known nerve agents. A number of studies were conducted by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to identify the effective oral dose regime which used

in conjunction with therapy would provide protection against nerve agent poisoning whilst producing minimal or nil side effects.

4. The administration of NAPS during the Gulf conflict of 1990/91 confirmed the results of the NAPS studies previously carried out at CBDE and in various external trials in that the side effects from the taking of NAPS were minimal and did not interfere with military efficiency. However, the MOD considered that a further more extensive study should take place at the Cambridge Military Hospital in order to assess the significance of the side effects from the taking of NAPS over a longer period. The study lasted for eight weeks. The conclusions of the study confirm the earlier findings in that the side effects from the taking of NAPS were minimal and did not interfere with military efficiency.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *886*, how many safety audits of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment have been carried out by the Safety Services Organisation of his Department since 1965.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 3 February, Official Report, column 886, how many safety audits of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment have been carried out by the Safety Services Organisation of his Department since 1965, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. Our records are not maintained in such a way as to easily provide the number of safety audits carried out since 1965 and to do so would involve disproportionate effort and cost.

4. Since 1987, the Safety Services Organisation has carried out a total of 21 safety audits made up of individual audits in each of four broad areas which are general, range safety, explosives and fire services.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service volunteers have been involved in studies with the NBC suit No. 1 Mk 4 at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1965; when these studies were carried out; what was the nature and conclusion of these studies; under which defence agreement the results of these studies were shared with other countries; and when this suit was issued for use by the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many Service volunteers have been involved in studies with the NBC suit No. 1, Mk 4, at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1965; when these studies were carried out; what was the nature and conclusion of these studies; under which Defence Agreement the results of these studies were shared with other countries; and when this suit was issued to use by the Armed Forces, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentration of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Studies into the Mk IV NBC suit involving Service volunteers began in the early 1980s. Since then approximately, 500 Service volunteers have been involved in studies of the Mk IV NBC suit at CBDE. The studies have investigated the physiological load imposed by wearing the Mk IV suit in various climatic conditions and the integrity of the complete ensemble when challenged with aerosols of sodium chloride and sodium fluorescein.

4. Further studies have been conducted at intervals since the introduction into service of the Mk IV suit in 1987. The physiological trials confirmed previous findings that wearing extra clothing over normal combat clothing reduced work tolerance times under certain climatic conditions and the integrity trials confirmed that the various items of UK NBC protective equipment provide effective protection.

5. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with our Allies under the agreements covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment such as those listed by the Right Hon. Archie Hamilton in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255–256.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the current Director-General of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down is expected to retire; and what is the name and background of his appointed successor.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Establishment. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when the current Director General of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down, is expected to retire; and what is the name and background of his appointed successor, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. I shall retire on 19 July 1995 although I shall cease to be the Director General and Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment on 31 March 1995. On 1 April 1995 CBDE becomes a division of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) whose Chief Executive will be John Chisholm, currently Chief Executive of the Defence Research Agency (DRA). This division will include the present CBDE and the Chemical and Electronic Systems Sector of the current DRA.

4. I shall be replaced at Porton Down by Dr Graham D Coley who will become the Managing Director of CBDE. His background includes 20 years at the Atomic Weapons Establishment, (Aldermaston) in a number of scientific and managerial posts,

followed by various posts in Whitehall, including being Deputy Head of the Efficiency Unit in the Prime Minister's Office, and latterly Assistant Chief Scientific Adviser (Projects) in the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which years since 1965 the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has carried out studies with service volunteers at Bulford; what was the purpose and conclusion of these studies; how many studies were carried out there; and how many service volunteers were involved in these tests.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking in which years since 1965 the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has carried out studies with Service volunteers at Bulford; what was the purpose and conclusions of these studies; how many studies were carried out there; and how many Service volunteers were involved in these tests, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and,

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. In a previous answer (Official Report, 24 June 1994, column 374–5); I said that studies involving Service volunteers took place inter alia at Bulford. A further check of our records has now shown that a transcription error occurred and that the Service volunteer studies took place at Bordon and not at Bulford.

4. One NAPS study took place at Bordon in 1981. Twenty five Service personnel took part of whom 15 received NAPS and 10 received a placebo. The conclusions of the study confirmed earlier findings that the side effects from the taking of NAPS were minimal and did not interfere with military efficiency.

5. The Nerve Agent Pretreatment Set (NAPS) was developed in response to a requirement which called for a pretreatment effective against poisoning by all known nerve agents. A number of studies were conducted by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to identify the effective oral dose regime which used in conjunction with therapy would provide protection against nerve agent poisoning whilst producing minimal or nil side effects.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times staff in *(a)* the biology division and *(b)* the chemistry and decontamination division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, have published the results of their research in scientific journals in the past two years; when they were published; and in which journals.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many times staff in (a) the Biology Division and (b) the Chemistry and Decontamination Division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, have published the results of their research in scientific journals in the past two years; when they were published; and in which journals, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. Staff in the Biological Division and the Chemistry and Decontamination Division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have had 21 and 6 publications respectively in scientific journals during 1993 and 1994. The journals in which these were published are:

a. *Analytical Proceedings.*

b. *Biochemical Pharmacology.*

c. *Biochemical Society Transactions.*

d. *British Journal of Pharmacology.*

e. *Chemistry in Britain.*

f. *Human and Experimental Toxicology.*

g. *International Journal of Biochemistry.*

h. *Journal of Applied Toxicology.*

i. *Journal of Chromatography.*

j. *Journal of Pharmacology.*

k. *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology.*

l. *Journal of Psychopharmacology.*

m. *Society for Neuroscience Abstracts.*

n. *Toxicology.*

o. *Toxicology In Vitro.*

p. *Xenobiotica.*

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the nature of the collaboration between the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and the Institute of Aviation Medicine with regard to the service volunteers programme; and in which years this collaboration took place.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what is the nature of the collaboration between the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and the Institute of Aviation Medicine with regard to the Service Volunteers programme; and in which years this collaboration took place, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and,

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. There has been long standing collaboration between CBDE Porton Down and the Institute of Aviation Medicine on a wide range of topics of mutual interest involving visits to and by each Establishment. This collaboration has addressed inter alia the effects of nerve agents on the visual acuity of pilots. Insofar as the Service Volunteer programme is concerned, CBDE and IAM have collaborated in the analytical methods used in carrying out studies with the Nerve Agent Pretreatment Set (NAPS).

Respirators

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service volunteers have been involved in studies with the S6 respirator at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down since 1965; in which years these studies took place; what was the nature and purpose of these studies; and under which defence agreement the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many Service volunteers have been involved in studies with the S6 respirator at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down since 1965; in which years these studies took place; what was the nature and purpose of these studies; and under which Defence Agreement the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and,

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Our records are not maintained in such a way as to identify the number of Service personnel who have participated in studies with the S6 respirator at CBDE. Studies have been carried out at CBDE on the protection afforded by the S6 respirator when worn by human beings. In addition, during the research and development phases of the S6 programme, user trials were conducted to determine the military acceptability of various aspects of the design. There trials took the form of issuing prototype respirators to units for use during routine exercises.

4. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with our Allies under the agreements covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment such as those listed by the Right Hon. Archie Hamilton in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255–56.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *889*, when the S10 respirator was issued for use by the armed forces; when the NATO triptych was laid down; and what are its provisions.

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 3 February, Official Report, column 889, when the S10 respirator was issued for use by the Armed Forces; when the Nato triptych was laid down; and what are its provisions, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The S10 respirator began entering service with UK Armed Forces in 1986–87, and is now the standard issue respirator for all Service personnel.

4. The current version of the NATO NBC Respirator Triptych was issued in May 1991 and replaced the original version issued in 1967. The Triptych comprise three sections headed: Operational Requirements, Technical Specifications, and Evaluation Tests and Criteria. These are further sub-divided into sections on protection characteristics, use characteristics, survivability, and storage and service life. These lay down the minimum requirements for various parameters such as comfort, compatibility with other equipment, field of vision, protection properties, flash resistance, care and maintenance, canister thread dimensions, and communication. A series of Annexes describe some of the test methods used in determining compliance with the requirements.

War Widows

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in how many cases a post-1973 war widow has *(a)* been warned that she might lose her attributable forces family pension or *(b)* had the pension terminated on the ground that she had been co-habiting.

Mr. Soames: Each new award to a service widow or widower is accompanied by a guide explaining the conditions of the award. The information includes advice to the pensioner that the pension ceases on remarriage or on living with a partner as husband and wife. The Paymaster General also issues an annual newsletter to every pensioner which contains a reminder that the Paymaster General is to be informed in the event of a service widow or widower's remarriage or living with a new partner.

Information on the number of widows whose attributable forces family pension has ceased on living with a man as his wife is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many post—1973 war widows are currently in receipt of an attributable forces family pension.

Mr. Soames: Departmental records of service widows pensions in payment do not separately identify those in receipt of attributable forces family pensions. There are, however, some 64,000 armed forces dependants' pensions in payment of which it is estimated some 2,000 will be attributable forces family pensions to service widows.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total annual cost of the attributable forces family pension currently being paid to post-1973 war widows.

Mr. Soames: Departmental records of service widows pensions in payment do not separately identify those in

receipt of attributable forces family pensions and therefore it is not possible easily to isolate the total annual cost of such pensions.

The current rates of attributable pensions for the dependants of those who gave service on or after 31 December 1994, excluding senior officers, range between £4,882 and £20,493 per annum.

Anglo-French Nuclear Co-operation

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many French Government employees have visited the United Kingdom to discuss or review nuclear matters during the last year; and if he will list the locations where the meetings took place.

Mr. Freeman: French Government employees frequently visit the United Kingdom to discuss a wide range of issues, including nuclear matters.

AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Health and Safety Executive issued a prohibition notice on the A45 facility at atomic weapons establishment Aldermaston; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Two prohibition notices relating to the A45 complex at AWE Aldermaston were issued by the Health and Safety Executive on 3 September 1993 following the spillage of some coolant from a lathe. The notices are a matter of public record and both have since been lifted.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decision to end the requirement at the atomic weapons establishments Aldermaston and Burghfield to submit fire reports to Berkshire fire and rescue service.

Mr. Freeman: It has long been the practice to alert the Berkshire fire and rescue service to all fire service calls received at AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield other than those concerning minor on-site road traffic accidents. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Blinding Laser Weapons

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what action he is taking to arrange the UN conference, convened for September 1995 in Vienna, to update the UN weapons convention to stop the development, production and use of blinding laser weapons;

(2) what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to bring about international agreement to make illegal and ban the use of weapons purely made for the blinding of people.

Mr. Soames: We are considering proposals to add to the UN weaponry convention a new protocol covering the employment of lasers.

NATO Air Defence Agreement

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors led the United Kingdom not to become party to the recent NATO agreement to develop co-operatively a medium extended air defence system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: A quadrilateral statement of intent on MEADS was recently agreed by France, Germany, Italy and the USA. We are currently reviewing the nature and timing of our requirement for a future medium surface-to-air missile, in parallel with studies into ballistic missile defence options. At this stage it would be premature to commit ourselves to meeting any such requirements through the MEADS programme, although we are keeping in close touch with its progress.

Boarding School Allowance

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving armed forces personnel in the United Kingdom who live within daily travelling distance of their work base have financial support from his Department for their children to attend independent schools; and what is his estimate of the cost.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. Boarding school allowance is paid to assist eligible service parents of all ranks to provide a stable education for their children and to avoid the disruptive school changes which would otherwise be likely to occur as a result of the frequent postings within the United Kingdom and abroad to which service personnel are liable. Eligibility depends on the liability of service parents to be posted within the course of a discrete stage of education for the child. It may well happen, therefore, that for part of this period the service parent is working and living close to the school selected for the child.

Clothing Contracts

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the delay in the allocation of Ministry of Defence clothing contracts in the current year.

Mr. Freeman: There have been no general delays in placing MOD clothing contracts in the current year. The placement of a small number of these contracts has, however, been delayed while Ministers reviewed MOD's response to the demise of the priority suppliers scheme.

Injury Compensation Claims

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance is normally given to members of the armed forces in pursuing claims against third parties for compensation for injuries in the course of their duties.

Mr. Soames: There is no general provision for such assistance from the Ministry of Defence either for members of the armed forces or for civilian employees. All personnel do, of course, have the same entitlement as members of the public to apply to the Legal Aid Board for assistance in bringing claims through the courts against third parties for damages for personal injury.

Service Housing

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the failure of the project to transfer MOD married quarters to a housing trust; and what are his present intentions for the married quarters owned by his Department;

(2) what severance payments are to be paid to Mr. Mike Robinson and Mr. Mark Taylor in respect of the failed

MOD housing trust project; how far these exceed the amounts required by contract; and who was responsible for negotiating the original contracts.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the employment of *(a)* Mike Robinson, as chief executive, and *(b)* the senior managers of the housing trust; and what sum of public money will be used to terminate their contracts.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give details of the severance clauses contained in the employment contracts of the current *(a)* chairman and *(b)* finance director of the Defence housing trust;

(2) what are his Department's future plans for the married quarters housing stock;

(3) what is the total cost of the severance pay, including pension rights, for *(a)* Mr. Mike Robinson, chairman of the Ministry of Defence Housing Trust, and *(b)* Mr. Mark Taylor, finance director of the Ministry of Defence Housing Trust.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is *(a)* the minimum and *(b)* the maximum amounts of severance pay that Michael Robinson and Mark Taylor, employees of the housing trust, are entitled to under their contracts;

(2) if he will list the criteria which will be used to decide if the Chief Executive of the housing trust receives a performance related bonus in April 1995;

(3) how much the chief executive of the housing trust has received, or will receive in severance pay;

(4) how much Mark Taylor, an employee of the housing trust, has received or will be receiving in severance payment.

Mr. Soames *[holding answers 8 and 9 March 1995]:* In keeping with our determination to improve the management of service housing, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced on 17 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1*, our plans to establish a Defence Housing Executive. This organisation will manage the married quarters estate on a fully integrated basis an deliver important management improvements as sought under the earlier proposals for a housing trust.

The trust proposals had to be abandoned when it was concluded that the proposed new body could not properly be classified to the private sector, and would not therefore be able to gain access to private sector capital to fund its operations and improve the housing stock. Since the three senior managers of the embryo housing trust had originally been recruited and appointed by the Ministry of Defence, following open competition, for the specific purpose of setting up and managing the trust, they were consequently entitled to be released from, and paid for the unexpired portion of their contracts. All three agreed to stay on, however, to assist us in reorganising the way in which we manage our housing estate and preparing for the establishment of the Defence Housing Executive.

This work, to which their contribution has been invaluable, has progressed well, and the Defence Housing Executive is on course to take up its responsibilities from 1 April 1995. Meanwhile, and in addition to the Defence Housing Executive initiative, we are continuing to consider alternative possibilities for transferring the married quarters estate to the private sector.

Once the Defence Housing Executive formally comes into being, my Department will no longer require the services of two of the senior managers, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Taylor. They will accordingly be made redundant on 31 March. In line with the provisions of their contracts, they will be entitled to compensation for the remainder of the three-year period of their contracts, calculated at the annual rate of the first year's salary plus any bonus earned during the first year. Although the amounts of compensation have yet to be finalised, they are expected to be around £200,000 for Mr. Robinson and £170,000 for Mr. Taylor, depending on the final assessment of performance against milestones agreed with their line management. The basic pay for their period of service will be pensionable.

I am pleased to be able to announce that the third manager recruited to the trust, Mr. James, will stay on in the role of chief executive of the Defence Housing Executive. Under Mr. James's direction, the executive will bring together the disparate housing staffs, and will manage and maintain the married quarters estate as a single entity in accordance with best professional practice. Drawing on may of the plans originally developed for the housing trust, it will be able to maximise efficiencies and provide a better service to service personnel and their families.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the total amount of fees paid to *(a)* estate agents and *(b)* consultants in relation to the sale of surplus Ministry of Defence houses in the period 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1994.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* Although this information is not available in the precise form requested, fees paid to estate agents and consultants in support of the land and buildings disposal programme total £7.27 million for the period in question. These fees cover the cost of advice on planning, highways and other matters, and help to ensure that the best return for the taxpayer is obtained.

Bilateral Cost-sharing Agreement

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *858*, what works under the bilateral cost-sharing agreement are being carried out at each of the named locations; how much money was owed by the United States Government under this agreement on *(a)* 31 March 1992 and *(b)* 31 March 1993; what percentage of the annual expenditure under this agreement this figure represented on both dates, excluding administration costs; and which agency is responsible for carrying out the works and for collecting the debts under this arrangement.

Mr. Soames: Works being carried out at the locations named in my previous answer cover operation and maintenance, minor and major projects. Bills with the US Government for payment amounted to £12,200,00 on 31 March 1992 and £7,040,000 on 31 March 1993 representing 13.5 per cent. and 8.7 per cent. respectively of the annual expenditure on US works under the agreement. The Ministry of Defence, defence works services—United States forces—is responsible for carrying out work under the cost-sharing agreement, and for managing the associated financial arrangements.

TREASURY

European Monetary Institute

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the percentage and numerical breakdown by nationality of the employees of the European Monetary Institute.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested as at 9 March 1995 is as follows:

Distribution of EMI appointments by nationality

Nationality	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Austrian	5	3.2
Belgian	9	5.8
British	29	18.8
Danish	4	2.6
Dutch	9	5.8
Finish	1	0.6
French	15	9.7
German	51	33.1
Greek	2	1.3
Irish	11	7.1
Italian	9	5.8
Luxembourg	0	0
Portuguese	0	0
Spanish	8	5.2
Swedish	1	0.6
Total	154	

Note:
Percentages do not sum to 100 per cent. because of rounding.

Exchange Rate Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the percentage change in nominal exchange rate between February 1993 and January 1994; and what were the policy considerations underlying this;

(2) what priority he attaches when he increases interest rates to *(a)* defending the exchange rate and *(b)* controlling inflation; and if he will make a statement on the connection between the two processes.

Mr. Nelson: Interest rates are set to deliver low inflation. Since changes in interest rates influence inflation with a lag, interest rate decisions are based on an assessment of the prospects for underlying inflation in one to two years' time. This assessment is based on a wide range of information including movements in the exchange rate. While the Government recognise the value of exchange rate stability, they do not have a target for the exchange rate. Figures for the nominal exchange rate are published by the Central Statistical Office in table 7.1A of "Financial Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the change in the exchange rate between February 1993 and January 1994 on the competitiveness of British manufactured goods at home and overseas.

Mr. Nelson: An assessment of developments in trade and the balance of payments, including competitiveness, was published in chapter 3 of the November 1994 "Financial Statement and Budget Report". This took full account of changes in the level of the exchange rate.

Barings

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Finance Corporation will be affected by developments at Barings.

Mr. Nelson: That is a matter for them, but from what the two institutions have told my officials, neither currently believes that it will be affected by developments at Barings.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 17 March 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost of publicity, publications and pamphlets, including court forms, produced centrally by the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1992 is as follows:

Year	*£*
1992–93	1,529,211
1993–94	1,342,743

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question relating to expenditure on publicity and on publications and pamphlets for each year since 1979, including the budgeted cost for 1995–96. The Public Record Office has a publications programme for the public records. The figures are:

Year	*£*
1990–91	13,282
1991–92	15,050
1992–93	39,954
1993–94	65,546
1994–95	[1]78,900
1995–96	[1]61,800

[1] Budget.

Information for earlier years is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

The Public Record Office has not held a publicity campaign or issued a publication whose cost has exceeded £50,000.

Letter from S. Hutcheson to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 March 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as a part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary question, listed on 14 March 1995, regarding expenditure on publicity and publications and pamphlets.

The Public Trust Office has not undertaken any publicity campaigns and none is planned for 1995–96.

The information required on all publications and pamphlets for each year since 1979 is not readily available and it would not be cost effective to produce the information required in the short period available. The budgeted figure for 1995–96 is not available as it is subsumed within other planned expenditure.

As the Public Trust Office has not been privatised there has been no related expenditure.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning total expenditure by HM Land Registry on all forms of publicity and all publications and pamphlets produced for each year since 1979. I can provide the following information.

(a) Publicity

The table below identifies publicity expenditure (expressed in 1994 prices) since 1989–90. These expenditures cover all public relations activities, communications to Land Registry staff and customer service literature. Prior to that date, no specific budget was held for these purposes. There has been no privatisation related expenditure incurred by the Land Registry.

Year	*£*
1989–90	3,368
1990–91	17,078
1991–92	24,400
1992–93	21,643
1993–94	10,765
1994–95	60,069
1995–96 (Budget)	46,489

(b) Publications and Pamphlets

The Land Registry produces a wide range of explanatory literature containing advice for practitioners and the general public on various aspects of land registrations practice and procedure and on the services that it provides. The cost of providing these publications is subsumed within the Registry's total stationery budget and individual elements cannot be identified. Stationery costs bear a direct relationship to the operational work of the Registry to which the majority of the budget is devoted.

In respect of publications issued by HMSO, for instance the Registry's Annual Report and Accounts, costs are borne by HMSO who aim to recover these from sales revenue.

As to the second part of your question, during the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 the Land Registry did not undertake any publicity campaign or produce any publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

There is no cost to the Exchequer for the Agency's publicity or publications as the Land Registry meets all of its expenditures from fees paid by those who use its services.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Mr. Gerry Adams

Mr. Gill: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what circumstances and under what provisions legal aid can be refused to Mr. Gerry Adams in his application for judicial review against the British Government; and what changes in the law are necessary to prevent Mr. Gerry Adams from claiming legal aid in his application for judicial review.

Mr. John M. Taylor: All applicants for civil legal aid must pass a test of their financial means and of the merits of their case if they are to be awarded legal aid by the Legal Aid Board. Legal aid will be refused if the applicant is unable to satisfy either of these tests. The statutory basis

for the grant of legal aid is the Legal Aid Act 1988 and the regulations made under it. Mr. Adams will be treated in the same way as any other applicant for legal aid. Any changes in the law relating to legal aid are made only when it seems sensible to do so in respect of all applicants.

EMPLOYMENT

Workplace Bullying

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research his Department has carried out over the last 10 years into the extent of workplace bullying.

Mr. Oppenheim: None.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for introducing a code of practice aimed at avoiding incidents of *(a)* workplace victimisation and *(b)* intimidation of employees.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Department has no plans to do so.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publication and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible, for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 3 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *747–48*, which provides information on all publicity expenditure for each year since 1979. The budgeted figure for advertising and publicity for 1995–96 is £10.6 million. Further information broken down by type of publicity is not available.

Separate information on privatisation-related publicity is not available.

Information about individual publications between 1 April 1993 and 1 March 1995 involving the expenditure of more than £50,000 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The following publicity campaigns costing over £50,000 were conducted during the period:

Career Development Loans

To encourage individuals to take up loans to improve their careers;

Make it Your Business

To raise awareness of national vocational qualifications and encourage employers to develop their staff and benefit from the result;

Just the Job/New Measures

To publicise the range of new Employment Service measures available to help people back into work;

National Training Awards

To encourage employers and individuals to enter the national competition for training excellence;

Investors in People

To encourage employers to develop their staff and benefit from the results;

Employment Service Employer Campaign

To encourage employers to use jobcentre services;

Disability Campaign

To encourage employers to recruit or retain or retain people with disabilities;

New Horizons for Women

To highlight opportunities for women to realise their potential in employment, training, public life and voluntary work.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, under the proposed jobseeker's allowance, he intends to retain the provisions in regulation 7B of the Social Security (Unemployment, Sickness and Invalidity Benefit) Regulations concerning restrictions on availability for work resulting from the person's physical or mental condition.

Miss Widdecombe: Jobseeker's allowance claimants will normally be expected to be available for a minimum of 40 hours a week. Regulations will reflect our policy that claimants with a mental or physical condition will be able to restrict their availability in accordance with their disability.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Exhibitions

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Refugee Council to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 19 June to Friday 23 June 1995.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to Child 2000 to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 12 June to Friday 16 June 1995.

TRANSPORT

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible, for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period

from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

Mr. Norris: For expenditure by my Department and its agencies on above-the-line advertising, I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the replies I gave on 14 February, *Official Report*, columns *524–25*. Information on other forms of publicity could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Level Crossings

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the location of each automatic open level crossing *(a)* remotely and *(b)* locally monitored, which currently fails to meet the criteria specified in the report produced by Professor Stott, with the dates by which the replacement of the level crossing is expected to be completed.

Mr. Watts: Of the 250 automatic open crossings on the British Rail system at the time of the Stott report, 74 were identified as likely to fail to meet the criteria established by Professor Stott.

The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate has advised me that all remotely monitored automatic open level crossings now meet the Stott report criteria.

The following four locally monitored automatic open level crossings currently remain to be converted to meet the Stott report criteria.

Grove road level crossing, Beccles, due for conversion late spring 1996;

Marton (Gypsy) lane level crossing, Middlesbrough, due for conversion late autumn 1995;

Runswarp level crossing, Whitby, due for conversion late autumn 1995;

Hunmanby depot (Sands lane) level crossing, Filey, conversion date under consideration by Railtrack.

Her Majesty's railway inspectorate has been in discussion with Railtrack to ensure that any delays are minimised.

ENVIRONMENT

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department spent the following amounts on water and sewerage during the financial years indicated:

Year	*£*
1991–92	92,800
1992–93	124,000
1993–94	141,300
1994–95	106,200

These figures exclude the expenditure of the Department's agencies and properties where water and sewerage charges are included in the rent.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the proposals set out by the Director General of Water Services at the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities, Sub-committee C on the environment, public health and education, on 1 March, on the placing of a legal duty on water companies to promote the efficient use of sewerage services.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend is meeting the Director General of Water Services to discuss the issues.

Berkshire

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will consult the Secretary of State for Education about the implications for the education service of the Local Government Commission's recommendations in respect of Berkshire;

(2) if he will consult the Secretary of State for National Heritage about the implications for the public library service of the Local Government Commission's recommendations in respect of Berkshire;

(3) if he will consult the Secretary of State for Transport about the implications for transport planning of the Local Government Commission's recommendations in respect of Berkshire;

(4) if he will consult the Secretary of State for Health about the implications for social services, with particular reference to the development of community care and the protection of mental health, of the Local Government Commission's recommendations in respect of Berkshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Decisions made by Government, including decisions on the recommendations of the Local Government Commission, are taken collectively.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the recommendations of the Local Government Commission in respect of Berkshire; and how many of these opposed the proposals.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received some 5,400 letters. Many of these have not been couched in terms of support for, or opposition to, the commission's recommended local government structure for the county as a whole, but approximately three quarters have expressed opposition to change. We have also received a petition of some 10,000 signatures in support of an alternative unitary structure and one of some 4,300 signatures in favour of a unitary Reading on extended boundaries. One hundred and thirty-five pro-forma leaflets have been received, 39 of which have expressed opposition to change.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Local Government Commission included the status quo as an option for public consultation in its review of local government structure in Berkshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No. The commission's consultation report and leaflets did, however, explain that it must recommend to the Government whether to change the existing structure of local government in the county or whether to make no change.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reach a decision on the recommendation of the Local Government Commission in respect of Berkshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As my right hon. Friend told the House on 2 March, *Official Report*, columns 1183–1202,

he expects to be able to make a statement in the very near future on Berkshire and those other counties on which decisions about local government structure have yet to be announced.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate the Local Government Commission has made of the additional administrative staff required by the proposals in respect of Berkshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The commission's financial estimates of costs and savings associated with its proposals for local government reorganisation in Berkshire, which were made publicly available in December 1994, incorporated the assumption that 129 additional staff would be required compared with the status quo. The staffing levels of local authorities are, however, ultimately a matter for the authorities themselves.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if joint arrangements between authorities would be needed for the implementation of the Local Government Commission's recommendation in respect of Berkshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It would be for the Berkshire local authorities to consider the most suitable means of service delivery, including whether voluntary joint arrangements were desirable for particular functions. For the fire service, the Local Government Commission has recommended a statutory joint authority.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what agreement he has arrived at with the member of the European Commission responsible for the regional development fund concerning the retrospective element of the single programme document in the United Kingdom objective 2 areas with effect from 1 January 1994.

Sir Paul Beresford: The regulations governing the use of the EC structural funds provide for expenditure incurred after 1 January 1994 to be eligible for European regional development fund grant. Projects which involve retrospective expenditure will be considered at the first bidding round in each programme area. No other agreement has a been reached regarding retrospection in the objective 2 programmes for which my Department is responsible.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what negotiations he has carried out on the setting up of a programme for the European regional development fund for the eligible parts of the United Kingdom for objective 2 funding for the period commencing 1 January 1997.

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the shire county areas, in respect of which the Local Government Commission has recommended the total abolition of the county council in favour of unitary authorities; and what percentage they represent of all shire county areas.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Local Government Commission recommended an all-unitary structure of local government in 10 county areas—that is, 26 per cent. of the 39 shire county areas in England. Specifically, it recommended that the county councils in Avon, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cleveland, Dorset, Humberside, North Yorkshire and Somerset should be abolished and that the Isle of Wight should have one unitary authority.

Housing Associations

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for increasing the amount of the housing association budget which can be spent for the Wirral.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The allocations from the Housing Corporation's approved development programme to local authorities in 1995–96 were announced on 15 December 1994, *Official Report,* columns *734–35,* and details were placed in the Library of the House. There are no plans for increasing these amounts.

Health Risks

Mr. Nick Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the health risk level accepted by his Department for ground level concentrations of *(a)* vanadium and *(b)* nickel in nanograms per cubic meters.

Mr. Atkins: *[Pursuant to his reply 2 March 1995, c. 695]:* I regret that some of the factual information given was incorrect. The answer should have been as follows:

My Department has no air quality standards for these substances but the World Health Organisation guideline for vanadium is 1 microgram per cubic meter—averaging time 24 hours. There is no WHO guideline for nickel, but the WHO estimate a lifetime cancer risk of 4×10^{-4} at a nickel dust concentration of 1 microgram per cubic meter.

EDUCATION

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for her Department and for all agencies and public bodies for which her Department is responsible, for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if she will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more that £50,000.

Mr. Forth: The expenditure figures for publicity and publications for the Department for each year since 1979–80 are given in the table. The figures for publicity cannot be disaggregated from publications.

£ million

Year	*Cash terms*	*At 1993–94 prices*
1979–80	0.10	0.25
1980–81	0.07	0.15
1981–82	0.14	0.26
1982–83	0.04	0.07
1983–84	0.09	0.15

£ million

Year	Cash terms	At 1993–94 prices
1984–85	0.17	0.27
1985–86	0.20	0.30
1986–87	1.07	1.58
1987–88	1.74	2.44
1988–89	1.67	2.20
1989–90	1.40	1.72
1990–91	4.52	5.15
1991–92	8.88	9.52
1992–93	6.89	7.10
1993–94	9.99	9.99
1994–95	[1]8.52	—
1995–96	[2]5.53	—

[1] Estimated.
[2] Budgeted.

The Department's agencies and public bodies are responsible for their own expenditure on publicity. Such information is not held centrally.

The Department has not been involved in any privatisation-related expenditure during this period.

From 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 the Department ran the following campaigns and issued the following publications costing more than £150,000.

Bullying Resource Pack (1994)

A pack produced for schools containing a video and information on how to counter bullying. Supported by television filler.

DFE Summer roadshow (1993 and 1994)

Information roadshow for parents and teenagers. Toured the country alongside the Radio 1 summer roadshow, to increase awareness of recent reforms and educational opportunities.

Drug Prevention Initiative (1994–95)

Launch and follow up regional conferences for teachers on the DFE drug prevention initiative, as part of a consultation process before publication of a circular for schools.

European Choice (1994)

A booklet on opportunities open to higher education students to study in Europe.

Further and Higher Education Charters (1993)

Distribution of information for students, parents and employers on standards to be expected in further and higher education. Supported by national press and radio advertising.

Grant-Maintained Schools Information (1993–1995)

On-going campaign to distribute a wide range of information leaflets for parents, teachers and governors, to enable schools to make an informed choice on the suitability for them of grant-maintained status. Supported by a press advertising campaign in 1994. Involved organisation of a series of regional conferences throughout the period 1993 to 1995.

It's Your Choice (1993 and 1994)

An information brochure about choices at 16-plus, to help students make an informed choice. Jointly funded with Employment Department Group and the Careers and Occupational Information Centre.

National School Tests (1993, 1994 and 1995)

Distribution of an information leaflet for parents explaining arrangements for tests and assessments in the national curriculum supported by press advertising in 1993 and 1994.

Private Finance Initiative (1994)

An information booklet setting out opportunities for investment of private finance in education. Distributed to business and education outlets, supported by national press advertising.

School Governors' Guides to the Law (1994)

An annual series of guides to the law for school governors, to help them to understand their legal rights and responsibilities.

School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (1993 and 1994)

Distribution to schools of an annual publication on school teachers' pay and conditions, to inform teachers of their pay arrangements for the forthcoming year.

School Teachers Review Body Report (1994 and 1995)

Purchasing copies of the annual report of the School Teachers Review body, published by HMSO, and distributing to schools, to advise teachers of the recommendations of the review.

Schools Update (1993–1995)

On-going production of a termly publication for school teachers and governors, to keep them up to date with new developments, and the availability of on-request information.

Secondary School and College Performance Tables (1993 and 1994)

Publication of information to enable parents and pupils to compare the performance of local secondary schools and colleges, in order to make informed choices of post-11 and post-16 destinations.

Special Educational Needs Information (1994)

Distribution through schools of a package of information for parents and teachers on special educational needs and the SEN tribunal, to keep them up to date with the consequences of new legislation.

Student Grants and Loans Booklet (1994 and 1995)

An annual guide for prospective higher education students to the system of student financial support, distributed to local education authorities.

Updated Parents Charter (1994)

Distribution to all households in England of an updated version of the 1991 parents charter, incorporating recent legislative changes to the education system.

Newbury College

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has made to the Secretary of State for Transport regarding the proposal of the Newbury Transport Forum to build a new route for the A34 through the site currently earmarked for a new campus for Newbury college.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has made no such representations.

Student Loans

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consultations she has had with the chairman of the Student Loans Company concerning the provision of student loans to students classified as bankrupt; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: There have been no consultations between Ministers and the chairman of the Student Loans Company on this matter. However, there has been correspondence between company executives and officials. The Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 does

not specifically prevent students classified as bankrupt from being eligible for a loan.

Parents Charter

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the final cost of the household distribution of the updated parents charter.

Mr. Forth: The Royal Mail was the sole distributor of the 1994 parents charter. To disclose the payment made to the Royal Mail would compromise the Department's confidential tendering procedures.

DEFENCE

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what powers he is seeking in the courts an injunction preventing Ms Lindis Percy, of Bradford, from entering Menwith Hill station; what proportion of the legal costs are being borne by the National Security Agency of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department is seeking an injunction against Ms Percy under the common law of trespass. The legal costs are borne by my Department.

Private Sector Contracting

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of cost savings were projected by his Department to arise from the implementation of its policy of transferring risk to the private sector in prime contracting; what savings have been made to date; and what savings are projected over the next five years.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence has introduced a wide range of initiatives to improve value-for-money in defence procurement. These act concurrently on project costs and isolating the effect of a single factor, past or future, is a very complex process. It is, therefore, not possible to quantify the cost savings attributable to the policy in recent years of transferring or sharing risk, whereby taut and incentivised contracts are used to place responsibility with the contractor for activities which they are usually best fitted to discharge. We know that the costs of failing to do this adequately in the past could run into many millions of pounds on a single large project.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leigh (Mr. Chisholm) of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *909*, if the planned reduction in the United Kingdom's deployed nuclear explosive power involves an increase or a decrease in the number of deployed nuclear warheads.

Mr. Soames: It is not our current practice to release details of nuclear weapons numbers.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the implications of the comprehensive test ban treaty for the future development of a new nuclear warhead by the United Kingdom;

(2) what are the implications of the comprehensive test ban treaty for the adaptation of existing warheads for any future new nuclear weapon by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: A comprehensive test ban treaty, effectively verified and commanding universal adherence, would have significant non-proliferation benefits. It would also place severe constraints on the five nuclear weapons states. We plan to develop further a range of techniques to enable us to maintain our nuclear capability in the absence of testing.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than 50,000.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TREASURY

Derivatives

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made as to the extent to which the Governor of the Bank of England's assurances of July 1994 on the monitoring of derivative trading were in the public interest.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has made no such assessment, but I am aware that the Bank of England has consistently made clear the risks involved in derivatives. The Governor's assurances of July 1994 related to the understanding of the most active players in the market and were balanced by a statement of the need to deter intermediaries who do not understand the risks involved. I recognise, as does the Governor, the need to ensure effective regulation of derivatives trading.

HEALTH

GPs' Night Visits

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has received in favour of her Department's offer to general practitioners of a new out-of-hours payment scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: We have met with representatives of family doctors on many occasions to discuss our offer to change the night visit payments scheme. The profession's representatives are in favour of change, and we are continuing to discuss what form a new scheme should take.

Dialysis

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the National Kidney Federation about the revised arrangements for the provision of home-based continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis.

Mr. Sackville: The National Kidney Federation has written to indicate its acceptance in principle of changes which will mean that continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis will be funded entirely through contracts let by health authorities after 1 April 1995. The federation has asked that these changes are monitored to ensure that the quality of services is maintained.

Breast Milk Substitutes

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of whether the principles set out in the World Health Organisation's international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes should apply to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sackville: The United Kingdom supported the adoption of this World Health Organisation code, by the World Health Assembly in 1981, as the recommended basis for action in member states. The Government have consistently supported breastfeeding as the best means of feeding a baby, and this is reflected in our policies and initiatives to promote and protect breastfeeding. We have also taken steps to restrict the advertising and promotion of baby milks in the Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations 1995 which came into force on 1 March 1995. The regulations implement the relevant European Community legislation which is firmly based on the principles and aims of the WHO international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes. The new regulations give a statutory basis to the restrictions on advertising in place since 1983 under the voluntary agreement with the baby milk manufacturers.

Listeria

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many strains of listeria monocytogenes are known to her Department; and what assessment has been made of whether each strain of listeria monocytogenes has the same potential effects on health.

Mr. Sackville: There are 13 main types—serovars—of listeria monocytogenes, each containing a number of strains. All strains contain virulence genes. This means that they all have the potential to cause human illness, although not all are reported to have done so.

NHS Cars

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *990*, what estimate she has made of the percentage of *(a)* midwives, *(b)* community nurses, *(c)* health visitors, *(d)* doctors, *(e)* other health professionals in the community, *(f)* managers, *(g)* board members and *(h)* other non-clinical staff who have access to an NHS car.

Mr. Malone: All employees and board members who have a need related to their post may have access to a national health service car.

Unlicensed Medicines

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the drugs with their respective uses currently administered in the national health service for which *(a)* a product licence has not been granted and *(b)* animal/toxicology and clinical trials have not been undertaken.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Under the Medicines Act 1968 and the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc.) Regulations 1994, doctors acting on their own responsibility may prescribe any medicinal product, whether licensed or not and irrespective of its indications for use, which they consider to be clinically appropriate for their patients' needs.

St. Mary's Hospital

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the up-to-date position regarding the negotiations between the regional health authority and the architects for St. Mary's hospital.

Mr. Sackville: The South and West regional health authority and the architectural firm Ahrends Burton and Koralek have announced that arbitration proceedings between them have been settled by mutual consent.

NHS Consultants

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole–time equivalent consultants there have been in the NHS in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Consultants—England (whole-time equivalents) 1989–1993 as at 30 September

Year	*Consultants*
1989	13,670
1990	14,190
1991	14,500
1992	14,850
1993	15,210

Note:
All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole–time equivalent consultants were appointed in each of the last five years as part of the new deal for junior doctors.

Mr. Malone: Our regional task forces report that appointments have been made as follows:

	Posts
1991–92	Nil
1992–93	213
1993–94	191
1994–95—to 30 September 1994	130
Total	534

Non-consultant Doctors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of whole-time equivalent staff grade and associate specialists in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table. Staff grade numbers are increasing as more posts are allocated up to a ceiling of 10 per cent. of consultant numbers which has now been reached. Associate specialist appointments are personal regradings, for which strict criteria are applied by regional offices.

Staff grade and associate specialists—England (whole-time equivalents) 1989–1993 as at 30 September

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Staff grade	30	250	470	710	1,050
Associate specialists	670	740	760	770	840

Note:
All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Hepatitis C

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department is doing on hepatitis C.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health is funding through its centrally commissioned research programme a project which is looking at behaviours associated with exposure to hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV infections.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant in aid from the Office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and which is, I understand, funding a number of projects researching into hepatitis C.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when her Department first became aware of the risk of transmission of hepatitis C through blood transfusion products; when blood transfusion products were first screened for hepatitis; and when the blood test for hepatitis C was first available.

Mr. Sackville: It has been known since the 1970s that, despite the introduction of testing for hepatitis B, some recipients of blood and blood products continued to develop hepatitis which was neither hepatitis A nor hepatitis B—NANB. In 1988 a virus called hepatitis C was reported in scientific literature, which was thought to be the main cause of NANB transfusion-associated hepatitis. The first anti-hepatitis C tests were reported in scientific literature in March 1989, but did not become available until later in the year. Expert advice was that these tests should not be introduced because of proven deficiencies. These first tests had a large number of false positive and false negative results and no satisfactory confirmatory tests were available. In due course, the test was improved considerably and also confirmatory tests became available. Routine testing of all blood donations for antibodies for the hepatitis C virus was introduced in September 1991, when the expert advice was that sufficiently reliable tests were available.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on any plans she has to compensate patients developing hepatitis C from transfusion of NHS blood products.

Mr. Sackville: The Government have no plans to make payments to patients who have been infected with hepatitis C as a result of national health service treatment.

Junior Hospital Doctors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who holds the job contracts of junior hospital doctors; and if she will make a statement on changes she is planning.

Mr. Malone: The job contracts of registrars and senior registrars are currently held by regional health authorities; those of senior house officers and pre-registration house officers are normally held by their employers, either trusts or health authorities. For information about our plans for the future, I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 9 February, *Official Report*, columns *369–70.*

Capital Projects, Barnet

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what capital projects have been completed in the London borough of Barnet with a works cost of over £1 million since 1979; and if she will give a brief description of each project.

Mr. Sackville: The figures in the table record national health service capital projects that have been completed within the boundary of the London borough of Barnet with a works cost of over £1 million since 1979, and a brief description.

NHS capital project	*Works cost £*	*Description*	*Year*
Barnet General Hospital	1,482,590	Kitchen and dining	1983–84
Central Public Health Laboratory Service, Colindale	14,620,183	Public health laboratory	1984–85
St. Stephen's Aids Centre	2,097,000	HIV day unit	1988–89
Edgware General Hospital	1,362,200	Pathology department	1988–89
Colindale Psychogeriatric Hospital	2,723,370	Psychogeriatric facilities	1989–90

Acamprosate

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much acamprosate was used in the NHS in 1994; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what guidelines are in place to regulate the use of acamprosate in the NHS, and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the use of acamprosate in the national health service in 1994 is not available centrally. Acamprosate is not licensed for use in the United Kingdom, although an application for such a licence is currently with the Medicines Control Agency. Before a licence is granted, the Medicines Control Agency will need to be satisfied as to the product's quality, safety and efficacy.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she has taken to secure the prevention of the spread of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus in the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health in EL(94)74, entitled "Improving the effectiveness of the NHSE", issued to the NHS on 28 September 1994 commended the revised guidelines for the control of epidemic methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus published jointly by the Hospital Infection Society and the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy in 1990. New general guidance on hospital infection control issued to the NHS on 8 March includes new advice on the surveillance of MRSA and other antibiotic resistant bacteria. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus have been reported in the NHS for each year since 1992.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Gulf War

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans her Department has to research potential links between the Gulf war and the outcome of pregnancies in service families.

Mr. Sackville: None. This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has had from Manchester city council about her proposal to reduce the city's AIDS support programme; what reply she is sending; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We received one letter on 17 February which was answered on 8 March.

London Initiative Zone

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what criteria the areas helped by the establishment of the London initiative zone were selected; and what plans she has to extend the life and scope of the zone.

Mr. Malone: The London initiative zone covers those areas where need is deemed to be greatest, services weakest and where both hospital services and primary care present further challenges. The LIZ is expected to continue until 1997–98. There are no plans to extend the scope and the life of the zone.

Accident and Emergency Services

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is held centrally on London ambulance service response times; what are the catchment areas served by local hospitals; what are the numbers of patients attending accident and emergency departments; and what is the number of patients attending minor accident treatment service units.

Mr. Sackville: Information is collected centrally for ambulance services, including the London ambulance service, on response times. Information on catchment areas and patient flows is available from district health authorities.

NHS Trusts (Litigation)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contingency plans she has in respect of court awards of large sums of money following litigation against health trusts.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 16 March, *Official Report*, column *706*.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for her Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which her Department is responsible, for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if she will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Widows' Pensions

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost of his Department's war widows' pensions currently being paid to post-1973 war widows.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Actual expenditure for 1994–95 post-1973 war widows' pensions is not available from the expenditure information currently collected, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The total estimated net cost of all war widows' pensions in 1994–95 is £361 million.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 2 February concerning a constituent.

Mr. Roger Evans: I sent a reply to the hon. Member today, having obtained a copy of the letter the day before. The original had not been received in the Department.

Maxwell Pensioners

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy concerning the position of Maxwell pensioners.

Mr. Lilley: In June 1992, I announced a number of exceptional measures to help the Maxwell pensioners. This followed the discovery of a shortfall in scheme assets of some £440 million, affecting the pension rights of some 32,000 pension scheme numbers. About 4,000 current pensioners faced large and immediate cuts in their payments and about 12,000 future pensioners had no prospect of their pensions coming into payment. These

measures have ensured that all pensions have stayed in payment while uniquely complicated asset recovery work has been undertaken by the pension scheme trustees and the liquidators of the Maxwell pension investment company.

The measures the Government took were: the provision of £2.5 million in emergency funding to keep pensions in payment in the short term; setting up the Department's Maxwell pensions unit and the Maxwell Pensioners Trust, chaired by Sir John Cuckney, which raised some £6 million; and deferring the collection of some £115 million in state scheme premiums payable on the pensioners' return to the state earnings-related pension scheme, which amounts to a substantial interest-free loan. Sir John Cuckney also acted as my adviser on the Maxwell pensions affair.

The Government and the Maxwell Pensioners Trust have encouraged the parties to Maxwell pensions claims to consider the possibility of out-of-court settlements and mediation so that the cost and delays of litigation can be kept to a minimum. On 10 February, I warmly welcomed the announcement by the scheme trustees and the liquidators that they had agreed in principle a basis of a major settlement of various claims. This agreement was subject to terms and conditions also being agreed and obtaining the necessary court approval. Other claims are unaffected and are being pursued separately.

I hope that the parties concerned will be able to finalise a settlement. I shall continue to follow developments closely as, I am sure, will others, including the Social Security Committee, who have done excellent work on behalf of the pensioners. Sir John Cuckney and the Maxwell pensions unit have played an important role in helping the parties to reach the basis for a major settlement. However, the task of bringing a settlement to a conclusion is in the hands of the parties concerned. So it is appropriate for the unit to cease acting as an independent entity and for me to release Sir John from his role as my adviser at the end of March.

The Government have played an active part in helping a resolution of the problems faced by the Maxwell pensioners. We have ensured that pensions continued to be paid by all Maxwell schemes while the scheme trustees and the liquidators undertook asset recovery work. We hope that the settlement recently agreed in principle can be concluded so that the pensioners can enjoy a secure future without the delays and costs of litigation.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *168*, how many of the people moving off incapacity benefit to sign on in 1995–96, and 1996–97, he estimates *(a)* will also receive an occupational or private pension and *(b)* will be aged 45 years or over.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in each of the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–89 he estimates will qualify for income support to top up a payment of *(a)* the lower rate of short-term incapacity benefit *(b)* the higher rate of short-term incapacity benefit and *(c)* the long-term rate of incapacity benefit.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The figures in the table are based on the estimated number of incapacity benefit recipients also in receipt of income support at the end of March each year.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*
Short-term incapacity benefit (lower rate)	40,000	40,000	40,000
Short-term incapacity benefit (higher rate)	30,000	30,000	30,000
Long-term incapacity benefit	170,000	200,000	225,000
Totals	235,000	265,000	290,000

Notes:
1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
2. As some estimates are based on small sample sizes, the data should be treated with caution.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals concerning invalidity benefit were *(a)* received and *(b)* decided in each of the quarters ending June 1993, September 1993 and December 1993; and what percentage of these were found in the claimants's favour.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Invalidity Benefit Appeals

Quarters ending	*Received*	*Heard and decided*	*Percentage in appellant's favour*
June 1993	5,689	1,800	51.7
September 1993	7,021	2,961	54.9
December 1993	7,150	3,225	57.8

Figures from "Quarterly Social Security Appeal Tribunal Statistics" produced by the Government Statistical Service.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of severe disablement allowance also receive an allowance for an adult dependant who is aged under 60 years who is not looking after children.

Mr. Hague: As at 3 April 1993 there were 3,000[1] recipients of severe disablement allowance, less than 1 per cent. of the total case load, who had an increase for an adult dependant but no increase for a dependent child in payment. Information is not available on the number of adult dependants who are aged under 60.

[1] Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claims in Great Britain rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Incapacity for Work Appeals

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the numbers and proportion of people who lodged an appeal during each of the quarters ending December 1994, September 1994 and June 1994 against

a decision that they were capable of work, who were for the period pending their appeal *(a)* signing on as available for work, *(b)* claiming income support without signing on under regulation 8 of the Income Support (General) Regulations and *(c)* without any state benefit.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available.

Information Technology

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 77, if he will state for each company the month and year in which they began employing staff from his Department.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The available information is given.

Date of leaving	*Company joined*
Information Technology Services Agency	
27 November 1992	AA Consulting
20 May 1994	Price Waterhouse
28 October 1994	Siemans Nixdorf
6 January 1995	Syntegra

The officers who joined Fairhaven Computer Services and ICL both applied to leave the Department to join the outside companies during the first quarter of 1990.

The officer who joined BT Datacommunications applied to leave the Department during the third quarter of 1991.

Benefits Agency Mail

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about acts of intrusion into the privacy of clients of the Benefits Agency with particular reference to the arrangements made with Royal Mail for the opening of mail to the agency.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mrs. Helen Liddell, dated 16 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning confidentiality aspects surrounding the opening of Departmental post.

The Government's Competing for Quality initiative subjects public functions to competition from the private sector. As part of this initiative the Benefits Agency has market tested its accommodation and office services, which includes post opening operations.

The work was placed in geographical packages before being market tested and the outcome has been a mixture of wins by in-house and external suppliers. The Royal Mail are now opening and sorting post for the Benefits Agency under a sub-contract to the in-house team in the Tyne/Tees, North and West Yorkshire, Scotland, East Midlands, Wales, Greater Manchester and South East areas. This is not a national contract. The sub-contract with the Royal Mail was not obligatory for successful in-house teams, but the in-house teams in these areas have the opportunity to provide significant service enhancements along with savings for the tax payer.

The contract specifications drawn up with the Royal Mail contain all the necessary safeguards to ensure confidentiality of information is maintained to the high standards required by the Civil Service. All staff directly involved in post opening are bound by the same stringent security and confidentiality rules, including each member of staff being required to sign a declaration acknowledging the provisions of section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, which makes it a criminal offence to disclose personal information provided for Social Security purposes. The Royal Mail is a Government body and consequently the staff are already governed by the Official Secrets Act.

The mail is opened under supervision in a separate, secure area which is locked at all times, and only staff directly involved in the contract will be allowed access to this room. Whilst the post is being opened and sorted no one is allowed to enter or leave the room. Any mail marked "Private", "Personal" or "Confidential" is left unopened. The sorted mail is then placed in sealed bags and delivered to the District Office sections each morning.

The Benefits Agency has ensured that in seeking to provide better value for money in the delivery of public services, standards of quality and confidentiality will not be sacrificed. In particular the Agency has:

specified carefully in the contracts the standards which must be observed;

ensured that staff are properly trained in post opening operations;

set up detailed and continuous procedures to monitor the standard of service being provided.

There are many opportunities for enhanced customer service, in terms of the Agency's business as a whole, to be gained from the new arrangements and I am confident that we are able to maintain our high standards of customer confidentiality.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Child Support Agency has produced to move its headquarters to the Dudley Child Support Agency centre; when the Child Support Agency intends to implement that proposal; and whether the chief executive of the Child Support Agency intends to base her own office and her support staff at the Dudley Child Support Agency centre.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is the responsibility of the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 17 March 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the relocation of the Child Support Agency's headquarters to Dudley.

A small project team was established in January to develop detailed proposals and plans for the relocation of the Agency's headquarters, and other centralised work, away from London. Implementation of these plans is now under way and proceeding to timetable. It is intended to relocate the Agency's headquarters to Dudley through a phased programme of moves by April 1996.

It is my intention to house both my own office and my support team at Dudley.

I hope that this is helpful.

Leaflet BAL4

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he introduced leaflet BAL4; what is its purpose and what was the reason for its introduction at that time; and if he will list the areas in the United Kingdom where the leaflet is being used.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, its chief executive. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. John Austin-Walker, dated 16 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the introduction, purpose and availability of leaflet BAL4.

In 1993, as Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, I met with the National Association of the Citizens Advice Bureau. At that meeting, concern was expressed that the Agency was asking people, as part of the process for allocating National Insurance numbers to new customers, to produce documents they would not normally have in their possession, in order to establish their identity.

I arranged for action to be taken and, following further investigation and consultation with other welfare groups, the leaflet BAL4 was published in September 1994. Customers are now more aware, as a consequence, of the type of documents that will be required to provide evidence of identity when claiming benefit. This has allowed the Agency to give a better service to its customers as the allocation of National Insurance numbers is quicker. Consequently, the administration and payment of benefit via the computer system, which of itself offers an enhanced service, can be implemented more speedily.

The leaflet was made available to 20000 external organisations as well as Agency offices throughout the United Kingdom.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Family Credit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of *(a)* new family credit claims and *(b)* renewal family credit claims are presently being processed with in (i) one week, (ii) four weeks, (iii) six weeks, (iv) eight weeks and (v) longer than eight weeks.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 16 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the clearance times of new and renewal claims to Family Credit. You requested details of the proportion cleared within one week, four weeks, six weeks, eight weeks and longer than eight weeks.

The table below details the information you have requested. Such figures are produced on a monthly basis and I have therefore provided information for the month ending 28 February 1995 which is the latest full month available. For the purposes of answering this question, one week has been calculated as 5 working days.

Percentage

	1 Week (1-5 days)	*4 Weeks (6-20 days)*	*6 Weeks (21-30 days)*	*8 Weeks (31-40 days)*	*Over 8 weeks (41+ days)*
New Claims	38.45	46.67	10.40	0.79	3.69
Renewal Claims	39.68	46.35	8.74	2.96	2.27

You may also be interested to know that Family Credit operates a Fast Track system for processing claims from the newly employed through the Employment Service. Information required for the assessment is provided by the customer's Client Advisor which enables the unit to assess the claim more quickly. Figures for the month ending 28 February showed that 90.06% of customers using the Fast Track system had their claim decided in 5 working days.

I hope you find this reply useful.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministers' Conduct

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will identify which forms of personal conduct are unacceptable for a Minister; and if he will amend "Questions of Procedures for Ministers" accordingly;

(2) if any Minister who has, or who has had, an extra-marital affair will be expected to resign.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

Paragraph 1 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" makes it clear that Ministers are expected to conduct themselves in such a way as to protect the integrity of public life. My right hon. Friend has no plans to amend it.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the salary paid to Mr. Peter Luff while employed as a specialist adviser to Ministers by the Department of Trade and Industry during the period 13 June 1987 to 24 July 1989 was supplemented by income from employment outside the Department.

Mr. Heseltine: Special advisers are bound by the same rules as civil servants regarding outside employment and their other financial interests. In general, these require that there should be no conflict between those interests and their official duties. Apart from this, their income is a matter for them.

Eurosolar UK

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contact his Department has had with Eurosolar UK; and what assessment he has made of Eurosolar UK's stated aims and activities.

Mr. Eggar: There have been exchanges of correspondence with Eurosolar UK and meetings between officials and representatives of Eurosolar UK. The Department was represented at the launch of Eurosolar

UK on 28 February. Eurosolar UK has been invited to express its views in the consultation process on the non-fossil fuel obligation and future renewable energy orders.

The Government welcome the launch of Eurosolar UK since its key aim is to promote the use of sustainable forms of energy which is in line with the Government's own policy in this area.

Funerals

Mr. David Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Office of Fair Trading will publish its report on prepaid funerals and the funeral industry.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I understand from the Director General of Fair Trading that he expects to publish his report on prepaid funerals during April.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information in precisely the form requested by the hon. Member is not readily available. The number of staff currently employed, or who have been employed during the last five years, on temporary contracts and then re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date is 70 for my Department and 279 for the agencies.

Ms Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information is not available in the form requested. The Department's "Expenditure Plans Report 1995"—Cm 2804—gives details in man years of casual staff planned in my Department and its agencies. Copies are available from the Library of the House.

Ms Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many employees in (i) his department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks of *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

	51 weeks	*Per cent.*	*Less than 51 weeks*	*Per cent.*
Department				
1989–90	14	0.2	131	2.0
1990–91	19	0.3	120	2.0
1991–92	7	0.1	75	1.2
1992–93	6	0.1	103	1.5
1993–94	10	0.2	83	1.3
1994–95	n/a	n/a	140	2.3
Agencies				
1989–90	13	0.2	272	4.1
1990–91	15	0.2	347	5.1
1991–92	19	0.3	322	4.7
1992–93	16	0.2	278	4.2
1993–94	29	0.3	334	5.3
1994–95	n/a	n/a	566	9.4

n/a Not available.

Exact figures for the current financial year are not available because some staff taken on during the course of the year will not have served a possible full 51-week term.

Ms Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* Several types of temporary appointment are permissable under the civil service Order in Council. The two types mainly in use in the DTI are the fixed-term appointment and the casual appointment. The full terms of employment offered are in accordance with the guidance issued by the Civil Service Commissioners and are set out in a letter of appointment and associated schedule, and the "Staff Handbook"—"The Guide". The letters of appointment and associated schedules for both types of appointment, together with a copy of "The Guide", have been placed in the Library of the House.

Ms Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The DTI and its agencies are required to follow recruitment principles set out in the civil service management code and the civil service Order in Council. The DTI guidance on the recruitment of non-permanent employees is based on these principles, and supplementary guidance which is issued from time to time by the Civil Service Commissioners.

Ms Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information in precisely the form requested by the hon. Member is not readily available. Those staff employed on temporary contracts in both the Department and its agencies are mainly used in the junior administrative grades.

Motor Manufacturing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the net loss of employment in the motor manufacturing industry as a result of the establishment of Japanese car plants in the United Kingdom; and what was the cost to public funds in grants and subsidies and in supporting those made unemployed.

Mr. Eggar: The United Kingdom has successfully attracted £3.5 billion of investment from Japanese car manufacturers which have established plants here since 1986. This has directly created 9,500 jobs and is generating £1.5 billion a year in additional component procurement in the UK and continental Europe. It has also made a major contribution to improving quality, productivity and competitiveness across the industry. The Government assistance provided was limited to £125 million to Nissan to establish and expand its Sunderland plant.

The United Kingdom is now the most rapidly expanding car manufacturing base in Europe with significant new investments announced in the last year by the major vehicle manufacturers. The recent announcement by Toyota of the expansion of its Burnaston plant is an important example of this. There has been a net loss of 27,000 jobs in the motor vehicles and parts sector since 1986 which reflects underlying improvements in competitiveness and the introduction of lean manufacturing techniques. It is not possible to determine the impact of these changes on the numbers unemployed and the associated costs to public funds.

Coal Subsidies

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount of subsidy has been paid to the coal industry since the White Paper "Prospects for Coal" was published; and to which mine each subsidy applied.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 16 March 1995]:* Since the publication of the White Paper "Prospects for Coal", subsidy paid to the coal industry under the Industrial Development Act 1982 amounts to about £9 million. Payments are in respect of Ellington, Monktonhall, Blenkinsopp, Lyn Clipstone, Rossington, Hem Heath and Markham Main. A further £1,650 million of financial assistance for the coal industry has been paid under the Coal Industry Acts.

Cable Television Franchises

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each cable television area *(a)* the company awarded the franchise, *(b)* the date cabling commenced or the current expected date of commencement, *(c)* the number of homes in the franchise area and *(d)* the number of homes cabled to date.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am writing to the hon. Member and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Murvi Motorcaravans Ltd.

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ensure that the application from Murvi Motorcaravans Ltd., which he received on 14 March, for regional selective assistance receives immediate attention.

Mr. Page: The application for regional selective assistance from Murvi Motorcaravans Ltd. is currently being appraised within the Government office for the south-west as quickly as resources permit.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Identity Cards

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make available as an alternative travel document to the British visitor's passport a United Kingdom identity card officially recognised throughout the European Union;

(2) when he will publish a Green Paper containing proposals for the introduction of a United Kingdom identity card.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: We intend publishing, later in the spring, a Green Paper on identity cards. This will set out and canvass views on the possible options for a national identity card scheme, including the use of a United Kingdom identity card as a travel document within the European Union.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the dates in each of the last three years when an inmate in Wandsworth prison has *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* sought to commit suicide and has needed hospital care.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tox Cox, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking the dates in each of the last three years when an inmate in Wandsworth has committed suicide or attempted to commit suicide.

There were no suicides in 1992, although five attempts were made.

Two prisoners killed themselves in 1993, one on 5 December and one on 8 December. In this year there were nineteen unsuccessful attempts at suicide.

In 1994 there were two deaths recorded as being death by misadventure, on 17 July and 2 November, and two suicides on 26 July and 20 November. There were 43 suicides attempts in this year.

Information on the dates of the suicide attempts is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Security Reclassifications

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many security reclassifications have occurred for each category of prisoner in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of security re-classifications of prisoners which have occurred for each category in each of the past five years.

Re-categorisations from Category B to C and from C to D are the responsibility of Governors of prisons and no central records are

kept. I regret, therefore, that the information requested about this group of prisoners is not available.

The relevant information about prisoners re-categorised from A to B is as follows:

Year	Number
1990	78
1991	85
1992	56
1993	51
1994	25

Prisons (Young Offenders)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of receptions into Prison Service custody of 15-year-old *(a)* girls and *(b)* boys; how many were (i) on remand and (ii) sentenced; and in respect of what offences they were committed, in each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what has been the number of receptions into Prison Service custody of 15 year old *(a)* girls and *(b)* boys; how many were (i) on remand and (ii) sentenced; and in respect of what offences they were committed, in each year since 1990.

The information requested for Prison Service establishments is given in the attached tables.

Receptions of 15-year-old remanded persons[1] into Prison Service establishments, England and Wales by offence 1990 to 1994[2]

	Violence against the person	Sex offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling	Other offences including drugs	Offence not recorded	Total
Males								
1990[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	380
1991[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	412
1992	46	8	136	39	77	46	25	377
1993	51	6	137	63	131	52	13	453
1994	63	10	184	102	178	76	15	628
Females								
1990[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
1991[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1993	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
1994	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1] Aged 15 years as at date of remand. [2] 1993 and 1994 information is provisional.
[3] Information for remand prisoners by offence is not available for 1990 and 1991.

Receptions of sentenced 15-year-old persons[1] into Prison Service establishments, England and Wales by offence 1990 to 1994[2]

	Violence against the person	Sex offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling	Other offences including drugs	Offence not recorded	Total
Males								
1990	27	12	151	26	83	53	84	436
1991	27	5	156	24	119	83	95	509
1992	39	3	152	42	98	93	35	465
1993	45	9	201	61	151	66	16	549
1994	69	5	261	77	191	85	21	709
Females								
1990	0	0	1	4	0	2	4	11
1991	0	0	4	1	3	1	3	12
1992	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	6
1993	10	0	0	6	5	4	0	25
1994	10	0	5	5	6	3	2	31

[1] Aged 15 years as at date of sentence. Excluding those committed in default of payment of a fine.
[2] 1993 and 1994 information is provisional.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Prison Service institutions have held 15-year-olds boys and girls in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 to date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking which prison service institutions have held 15 year old boys and girls in (a) 1994 and (b) 1995 to date.

The readily available information relates to the populations of 15 years olds, in boys and girls prison service establishment on 30 June 1994 and 31 January 1995, and it is given in the attached tables. A copy of these tables has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Prison Escort Services

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of *(a)* privately managed *(b)* police and *(c)* Prison Service escorts are carried out in secure cellular vehicles for the latest dates for which figures are available;

(2) what percentage of *(a)* Group 4's prisoners' escorts and *(b)* Prison Service escorts are transported in secure vehicles;

(3) how many prison escapes have occurred in the Metropolitan area since Securicor commenced escort services there;

(4) what are the number of prisoner movements for each escort area in the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about prisoner escorts.

Information on the number of prisoner escorts for each escort area in the last five years is either not available or could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Neither the Prison Service nor the police record it centrally. The limited information which is readily available relates to those areas where court escort and custody services have been contracted out and is given below.

In Area 7 (East Midlands and Humberside) there were approximately 100,000 prisoner movements in 1993–94 and there have been approximately 107,000 such movements until 28 February in this financial year. A prisoner movement is defined as either the escorting of a prisoner from a prison or police station to court or from court to his place of custody. In Area 3 (the Metropolitan Police District) Securicor conducted approximately 57,000 prisoner escort movements between 27 June 1994, when they began operating, and 28 February 1995, although this does not represent all of the movements in the area.

In Areas 4 (East Anglia) and 6 (Merseyside), Greater Manchester and North Wales) contracts have been awarded to Group 4 for the provision of prisoner escort services for operation from July this year. Special exercises were conducted in 1994 to establish the likely number of prisoner movements the contractor would have to manage. These produced estimates of approximately 95,000 prisoner movements in Area 4 and 201,000 in Area 6 each year.

Information on the percentage of prisoner escorts conducted in secure, including cellular, vehicles is not recorded by the police and prison services. Again, the only information available relates to privately managed prisoner escorts.

It is the general policy of contractors to transport all prisoners in cellular vehicles except where special circumstances apply, for example where the prisoner is heavily pregnant or a nursing mother or disabled. In Area 3 Securicor have conducted 98.3 per cent of prisoner escorts using cellular vehicles and in Area 7 Group 4 estimate over 99 per cent of such escorts have been in cellular vehicles.

Since Securicor began managing prisoner escorts in Greater London in June 1994 there have been two escapes from their custody. This compares with 16 in 1993 under the previous arrangements. The two figures are not directly comparable because the contract with Securicor is being phased in and will not be fully operational until June this year. Nevertheless, the figures so far indicate their performance will be better.

Prison Workshops

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* workshop and *(b)* education places there were in the Prison Service in each of the last 15 years broken down by prison population in each year;

(2) how many workshop places were available for prisoners in each of the last 15 years broken down by the number of places per prison population.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of workshop and education places at Prison Service establishments in each of the last 15 years.

There is no fixed allocation of places for prisoners to attend education classes. The number of prisoners able to attend full-time or part time education courses is determined according to need. In addition to classroom based teaching there is also tuition for prisoners at other locations, such as in the prison hospital, and teaching staff provide support to prisoners undertaking private study.

Information on work places for prisoners in industries and farms is available only from 1987, and from 1988 for vocational training places. This information is given in the attached table, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons library.

		Employment places				
	Average population in prison service establishments	*Industries*	*Farms*	*Vocational training courses*	*Total employment places, industries, farms and vocational training*	*Total places as percentage of prison population*
1987	48,426	12,981	3,637	Not available	16,618	34.3
1988	48,872	11,848	3,706	1,942	17,496	35.8
1989	48,500	12,173	3,817	1,932	17,922	37.0
1990	44,975	11,898	3,609	2,187	17,694	39.3
1991	44,809	11,143	3,523	2,519	17,185	38.4
1992	44,719	11,003	3,474	2,589	17,066	38.2
1993	44,551	10,026	3,508	2,608	16,142	36.2
1994	48,621	10,024	3,508	2,597	16,129	33.2

Prison Operating Costs

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the current net operating cost per prisoner place in *(a)* local prisons and remand centres, *(b)* contracted-out prisons, *(c)* dispersal prisons, *(d)* category B training prisons, *(e)* category C training prisons, *(f)* adult male open prisons, *(g)* young offender closed establishments, *(h)* young offender open establishments, *(i)* young offenders remand establishments, *(j)* female establishments and *(k)* non-operational establishments; what is the net headquarters operating cost, and, when this figure is added to the above establishments costs, what is the net

operating cost per prisoner place before exceptional items for the Prison Service in England and Wales from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995;

(2) what is the net operating cost per prisoner place per annum for each of the local prisons and remand centres, excluding the contracted-out prisons, in England and Wales from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions on net operating costs.

Figures for 1994–95 will be published later this year in the Prison Service Annual Report for 1994–95. Figures for 1993–94 have been published in section A of Part Two of the Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Prison Escapes

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of escapes from prison establishments and from prison escorts for each of the local prisons and remand centres, excluding contracted-out prisons, in England and Wales from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of escapes from prison establishments and prison escorts for each of the local prisons and remand centres, excluding contracted out prisons, in England and Wales from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995.

The attached table shows the information requested from 1 April 1994 to 9 March 1995 inclusive, for those establishments where escapes occurred. A copy of this table has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Establishment	*Number*
Bedford	2
Birmingham	1
Brixton	1
Chelmsford	1
Durham	4
Elmley	1
Exeter	1
Gloucester	1
Holme House	2
Hull	1
Leicester	1
Lewes	1
Lincoln	2
Liverpool	2
Manchester	1
Norwich	2
Pentonville	2
Preston	1
Shrewsbury	1
Swansea	4
Wandsworth	1
Brinsford	3
Hindley	1
Rochester	2
Total	39

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of total escapes from prison establishments and from escorts since 1 April 1994 from *(a)* local prison and remand centres contracted out, *(b)* prisons, *(c)* dispersals, *(d)* category B training prisons, *(e)* category C training prisons, *(f)* adult male open prisons, *(g)* young offender closed establishments, *(h)* young offender open establishments and *(g)* female establishments.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of total escapes from Prison Service establishments and from escorts since 1 April 1994.

The information is given in the following table for the period 1 April 1994 to 9 March 1995 inclusive.

	Escapes
Local Prisons/Remand Centres	39
Contracted Out Prisons	1
Dispersals	9
Category B Training Prisons	5
Category C Training Prisons	104
Adult Male Open Prisons	0
Young Offender Closed Establishments	27
Young Offender Open Establishments	0
Female Establishments	11
Total	[1]196

[1] This figure excludes 15 escapes from escort that were previously the responsibility of the police and are now the responsibility of private contractors.

Prison Officers (Time Off)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours were owed to prison officers under the time off in lieu scheme in total and for each prison in England and Wales for *(a)* the latest date available, *(b)* six months ago, *(c)* 12 months ago, *(d)* 18 months ago and *(e)* two years ago.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many hours were owed to prison officers under the TOIL scheme in total and for each prison at different times in the past two years.

The information is not available centrally in precisely the form requested and could be collated only at disproportionate cost. However, a survey was completed recently, covering a similar period and the figures from it, which are provisional, have been included in the attached table, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Prisons (Assaults)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences relating to assaults proved in disciplinary proceedings, including attempted assaults, incitement and assisting other prisoners in assault excluding criminal proceedings relating to assaults took place in each local prison and remand centre excluding contracted-out prisons in England and Wales since 1 April 1994; and how many took place in *(a)* local prisons and remand centres, contracted out, *(b)* prisons, *(c)* dispersals, *(d)* category B training prisons, *(e)* category C training prisons, *(f)* adult male open prisons, *(g)* young offender closed establishments, *(h)* young offender open establishments and *(i)* female establishments.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of proved offences of assault at disciplinary proceedings since 1 April 1994.

The enclosed tables give the number of assaults for each non-contracted out local prison and remand centre and the total number of assaults by type of Prison Service establishment. A copy of these tables has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Table 1: Assaults proved at adjudication[1] April 1994—February 1995[2]: Remand Centres and Local Prisons[3]

	Assaults
Remand centres	844
Brinsford	102
Cardiff	18
Dorchester	1
Exeter	20
Feltham	130
Glen Parva	91
Gloucester	23
Hindley	65
Lancaster Farms	48
Low Newton	42
Moorland	80
Northallerton	37
Norwich	12
Reading	43
Rochester	61
Stoke Heath	24
Swansea	21
Wood Hill	26
Local prisons	1,654
Bedford	26
Belmarsh	94
Birmingham	88
Bristol	28
Brixton	76
Bullingdon	54
Camp Hill	—
Canterbury	11
Cardiff	37
Chelmsford	36
Dorchester	4
Durham	36
Elmley	49
Exeter	13
Gloucester	13
Highdown	65
Holme House	35
Hull	91
Leeds	136
Leicester	42
Lewes	29
Lincoln	39
Liverpool	69
Manchester	64
Norwich	38
Pentonville	86
Preston	56
Shrewsbury	30
Swansea	12
Wandsworth	134
Winchester	36
Wood Hill	73
Wormwood Scrubs	54

[1] Includes attempt, incite or assist in an assault. [2] Provisional figures. [3] Excludes contracted-out establishments (Blakenhurst, Doncaster, Wolds).

Table 2: Assaults proved at adjudication[1] April 1994–February 1995[2]: By type of establishment

All Prison Service Establishments	5,190
Males	
Contracted-out local prisons and remand centres[3]	309
Non-contracted-out local prisons and remand centres[4]	2,498
Dispersal prisons	312
Category B training prisons	222
Category C training prisons	503
Open Prisons	18
Closed Young Offender Institutions	621
Open Young Offender Institutions	34
Juvenile Young Offender Institutions	264
Females	
Female Establishments	409

[1] Includes attempt, incite or assist in an assault. [2] Provisional figures. [3] Contracted-out establishments: Blakenhurst, Doncaster, Wolds. [4] Excludes Blackenhurst, Doncaster, Wolds.

Super-prisons

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to develop a super-prison along the lines of Oak Park Heights in Minnesota USA.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on what plans there are to develop a super-prison along the lines of Oak Park Heights in Minnesota, USA.

The new prison building programme includes no plans to develop a super-prison along the lines of Oak Park Heights in Minnesota, USA.

Prison Officers' Training

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many weeks basic training is given to *(a)* prison officers and *(b)* prison custody officers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many weeks basic training is given to (a) prison officers and (b) prisoner custody officers.

The basic training of prison officers (ie those who work at directly managed prisons) consists of nine weeks (256 hours) residential initial training at the Prison Service College. In addition, there is two weeks before and two weeks after the formal training, which is spent at their parent establishment in observation and induction.

Under the Criminal Justice Act 1991, prisoner custody officers (PCOs) may be certificated either for custodial duties at a prison or for escort functions, or both. The minimum training required for escort PCOs is 234 hours, and for custodial PCOs 269. This excludes company induction and on the job training (the equivalent of the 4 weeks observation and induction training for prison officers).

Prison Overcrowding

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the average percentage overcrowding in each local prison and remand centre in England and Wales since 1 April 1994 on the basis of the methodology as applied within section B performance statistics of the Prison Service annual report and accounts for 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average percentage overcrowding in each local prison and remand centre in England and Wales since 1st April 1994. The statistics have been calculated using the methodology applied within Section B performance statistics of the Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts for 1st April 1993 to 31st March 1994.

The information requested is given in the attached table, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Average Percentage Overcrowding in each Local Prison and Remand Centre in England and Wales over the Period 1 April 1994 to 17 February 1995

Local Prisons	*Per cent.*
Bedford	7
Belmarsh	—
Birmingham	40
Blakenhurst	—
Bristol	6
Brixton	24
Bullingdon	6
Canterbury	41
Cardiff	30
Chelmsford	54
Doncaster	—
Dorchester	45
Durham	59
Elmley	—
Exeter	52
Gloucester	32
Highdown	—
Holme House	—
Hull	25
Leeds	28
Leicester	76
Lewes	16
Lincoln	38
Liverpool	25
Manchester	13
Norwich	14
Pentonville	29
Preston	35
Shrewsbury	64
Swansea	29
Wandsworth	3
Winchester	18
Wolds	—
Woodhill	1
Wormwood Scrubs	29
Remand Centres	
Brinsford	11
Cardiff	23
Doncaster	—
Dorchester	46
Exeter	14
Feltham	—
Glen Parva	44
Gloucester	—
Hindley	—
Lancaster Farms	—
Low Newton	19
Northallerton	12
Norwich	—
Reading	—
Rochester	—
Stoke Heath	—
Swansea	—
Woodhill	12

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been adjudicated against for possession of drugs in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners adjudicated against for the possession of a controlled drug in the last five years.

The numbers in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales are given below.

Possession of controlled drugs: Offences[1] proved at adjudication hearings, England and Wales, 1990–1994

Year	*Number*
1990	2,650
1991	2,798
1992	2,041
1993	1,797
1994	[2]2,414

[1] Including attempts, incite or assist.
[2] Provisional.

Parkhurst Prison

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 March, *Official Report*, column *663*, on Parkhurst prison, on what date he passed the question to Mr. Derek Lewis for a reply.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Chris Mullin, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the answer of 2 March, Official Report, column 663, on Parkhurst prison.

You asked on what date the Question was passed to the Prison Service.

Your Question was passed to the Prison Service on 18 January.

Swaleside Prison

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the proposal to construct a six-hole golf course at Swaleside prison on the Isle of Sheppey; what costs were incurred before its cancellation; what information officials in his Department or in the Prison Service had about the proposal; and what guidelines are issued to prison governors to control expenditure on leisure facilities of this nature.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Sir Roger Moate, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the proposal to construct a six hole golf course at Swaleside Prison on the Isle of Sheppey; what costs were incurred before its cancellation; what information officials in his Department or in the Prison Service had about the proposal; and what guidelines are issued to prison governors to control expenditure on leisure facilities of this nature.

The governor of Swaleside prison obtained agreement from the Kent area manager to enhance sports facilities available to prisoners at Swaleside, including the provision of three golf greens (each of two holes). Officials in the Prison Service Enterprise and Activity Services were asked to provide technical advice on construction and costings.

When I learned of the proposal I took the view that it was inappropriate and I instructed that the project be cancelled.

Current indications are that liabilities of less than £17,000 exclusive of VAT have been incurred and it is expected that much of this cost will be recoverable.

Expenditure on leisure facilities is subject to the normal budgetary controls, project approval requirements and tendering rules. In addition, governors are required to ensure that any expenditure is appropriate to a prison and provides good value for money.

Boot Camp Prisons

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the conclusions of any studies available to him as to the effectiveness of boot camp prisons in the United States of America.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Copies of the readily available published reports have been placed in the Library.

Prison Staff Costs

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the staff costs, *(b)* the staff cost per place per annum, *(c)* the staff cost per prisoner per annum for (i) Blakenhurst prison and (ii) the Wolds prison for the years beginning 1 April 1993 and 1 April 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the staff costs of Blakenhurst and Wolds Prisons.

The Prison Service pays a fee to UK Detention Services Ltd and Group 4 Prison Services Ltd to manage Blakenhurst and Wolds prisons respectively. It is not broken down into such elements as staff costs. The Prison Service does not have the details requested about staff costs for Blakenhurst and Wolds. These are matters for the companies in question.

WALES

Class Sizes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the average class sizes in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary local education authority schools in (i) 1987 to 1990 and (ii) the last available year in each of the counties of Wales.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is shown in the following table. For secondary schools, comparable information cannot be provided for all the years requested.

LEA maintained primary schools

Average class size

	September 1987	*September 1988*	*September 1989*	*September 1990*	*January 1994*
Clwyd	25.5	25.8	25.7	24.9	26.2
Dyfed	21.4	21.8	21.0	20.7	21.7
Gwent	25.7	26.4	26.9	27.1	27.4
Gwynedd	21.1	21.6	22.1	21.8	22.7
Mid Glamorgan	26.0	26.2	26.2	26.8	27.0
Powys	20.2	20.3	20.6	21.1	22.2
South Glamorgan	27.0	26.7	26.4	26.0	27.5
West Glamorgan	24.2	24.8	25.1	25.3	25.7
Wales	24.5	24.8	24.8	24.8	25.6

LEA maintained secondary schools	Average class size[1] at September				Average class size[2]	
	1987	1988	1989	1990	September 1990	January 1994
Clwyd	19.8	19.9	19.6	19.5	21.2	20.5
Dyfed	18.7	18.8	18.7	18.8	20.3	19.7
Gwent	18.4	18.4	18.5	18.9	20.2	20.0
Gwynedd	17.7	17.5	17.2	17.5	19.6	18.7
Mid Glamorgan	19.9	19.5	19.3	19.9	21.6	19.9
Powys	16.7	15.9	16.5	17.5	18.5	17.3
South Glamorgan	20.6	20.3	20.0	20.2	22.9	21.9
West Glamorgan	19.1	18.8	18.9	19.6	22.0	21.1
Wales	19.1	19.0	18.9	19.2	21.0	20.1

Notes:
[1] Number of pupils divided by the number of teachers teaching in a specified period on the day of the schools census.
[2] Number of pupils divided by the number of classes in which they were being taught in a specified period on the day of the schools census.
Source:
Schools Census.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many abattoirs there were in 1993 and 1994; and how many of these met European Community standards.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1993 and 1994 there were 39 licensed red meat abattoirs in Wales. Of these six were fully approved to trade throughout the European Community and the remainder were approved to trade on the national market. All these red meat abattoirs were licenced in accordance with European Community requirements under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection Regulations) 1992.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he or his officials last met the National Farmers Union in Wales to discuss the issue of the live export of sheep to continental Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I met representatives of the National Farmers Union (Wales) on 24 January 1995.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he or his officials last met the Farmers Union of Wales to discuss the issue of the live export of sheep to continental Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I met representatives of the Farmers Union of Wales on 24 January 1995.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that lambs exported from Wales in line with the minimum standards for the road and sea transportation of such animals reach their destinations without hindrance.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Progress on the question of the transport of live animals will best be achieved by reaching an agreement throughout the European Community which would allow the trade to operate on a basis acceptable to all. The United Kingdom continues to press for progress at the Council of Agriculture Ministers. Although agreement on transport requirements was not possible at the February meeting of the Council, the presidency has confirmed that it will be taking discussions forward. In the meantime, there are signs that public awareness on animal welfare issues is growing in other parts of Europe, and that the prospects for progress at the European Community level are more encouraging; we shall be working hard to maintain the momentum we have achieved.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to attend a meeting of the Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I will do so when a suitable opportunity occurs.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children have received statements for special educational needs in each year since 1987 in *(a)* Dyfed, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Britain.

Mr. Richards: The number of children for whom statements of special educational needs were made for the first time, for each calendar year since 1987, are shown in the following table. Figures for Britain as a whole are not available in the same format.

Calendar year	Dyfed	Wales
1987	104	1,552
1988	121	1,948
1989	193	2,099
1990	225	2,227
1991	272	2,456
1992	397	2,650
1993	437	2,881

Welsh Language Letters

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received pursuant to his decision to decline to sign letters written in the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received about 30 representations. All correspondents writing to me in Welsh receive a reply in Welsh as well as in English.

Meningitis and Tuberculosis

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many identified cases of meningitis there were in Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many identified cases of tuberculosis there were in Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The numbers of notifications of meningitis and tuberculosis in Wales reported to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in each year since 1990 are shown in the following table:

Notifications	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*[1]	*1994*[2]
Meningitis (all forms)	203	202	210	190	185
Tuberculosis (all forms)[2]	194	166	201	199	184

[1] Provisional.[2] Excluding chemoprophylaxis.

Eisteddfod

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he intends to visit the Urdd national eisteddfod this year;

(2) if he intends to visit the Royal national eisteddfod this year.

Mr. Redwood: I have made no decision as yet.

Transition Committees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation this Department has undertaken to oversee the formation of transition committees in Wales pursuant to the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As required under section 46 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, transition committees have been established in all the unitary authority areas.

In July 1994, guidance was issued to transition committees on the preparatory work to be done in the time leading up to 1 April 1996.

Since then, officials have maintained contact with transition committees and, where necessary, they have sought confirmation of progress in relation to certain matters.

Defence Employment

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed in the defence industry in Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: There is no standard definition of defence industry employment. However, the Ministry of Defence publishes regional figures on the number of its own service and civilian staff and estimates of the number of employees in private industry involved directly in world for the Ministry. These figures are shown in tables 1.9 and 2.4 of "UK Defence Statistics, 1994", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Toy Libraries

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the grants given to toy libraries in Wales in each of the last five years.

Mr. Richards: A grant of £10,650 was made to the Montgomeryshire toy library in 1991–92 under the Department's child and family services grant scheme.

Toy libraries may also apply to county voluntary bodies under the "small grant" element of that scheme—grants up to £1,000. Details of such awards are not held centrally.

Tourism

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed in the tourist industry in Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 12 December, *Official Report*, column *517*.

Business Start-Ups

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to gather the information necessary to produce a comprehensive and accurate figure for the number of annual business start-ups in Wales and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: No. No country keeps a comprehensive list of all their enterprises. For most practical purposes the figures for VAT registrations are adequate in both Wales and the United Kingdom. Attempting to acquire more complete information would put an unnecessary burden on all small businesses.

Anthrax

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of anthrax were reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Richards: The number of confirmed cases of anthrax reported in each year in Wales since 1985 was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1985	2
1986	1
1987	1
1988	Nil
1989	1
1990	1
1991	Nil
1992	1
1993	Nil
1994	Nil

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Redwood: Figures for the current year are not available. For previous years expenditure is:

Year	*£*
1991–92	79,319
1992–93	44,262
1994–95	48,807

Brucella Melitensis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of brucella melitensis were reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No cases of brucella melitensis have been recorded in Wales since 1985.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for which geographical areas and with which local authorities, joint venture agreements or heads of terms agreements were entered into by the Welsh Development Agency under the urban programme during the period for 1991 to 1994 inclusive.

Mr. Redwood: I will arrange for the chief executive of the agency to write to my hon. Friend and for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Morriston Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *444*, about the market testing of the cardiac unit at the Morriston hospital, on how many occasions he met each of the four organisations bidding for the cardiac surgery unit at Morriston hospital contract during the contract tender period *(a)* prior to 1 October 1994 and *(b)* after 1 October 1994 but before 2 March.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1326–27*, and to my letter of 24 November 1994.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 23 February, *Official Report*, column *301*, what representations he has had from conservation voluntary organisations concerning progress on habitat loss mitigation measures arising from the Cardiff bay barrage and the European wilds birds and habitat directives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None. As I stated in reply to a question by my hon. Friend for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) on 3 March, *Official Report*, column *769*, the Cardiff Bay development corporation, acting on the advice of the Countryside Council for Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Land Authority for Wales, is reviewing the options for suitable site locations along the south Wales coastline between the Burry inlet and the Gwent levels. I hope to make an announcement about site acquisition within the next two to three months.

National Nature Reserves

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the proposed levels of funding ensure the development of the national nature reserves beyond essential care and maintenance.

Mr. Redwood: The funds allocated by the Countryside Council for Wales toward maintenance of national nature reserves are sufficient to maintain their legal obligations.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the single programming document area monitoring committee concerning the division of European regional development funds coming to Wales between *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the Welsh Development Agency, *(c)* other non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* other organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None. There are no such pre-determined splits between sponsors. Each sponsor submits its projects in competition with all others and, as a result of them being carefully appraised against agreed selection criteria, an eventual list of approved projects is established.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had in relation to probability factors pertaining to the attainment of the anticipated levels of financial assistance from the European regional development fund to the Welsh Development Agency in ascending amounts corresponding to descending amount of grant in aid from his Department's budget.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had concerning the reconciliation of the project-by-project basis of assessment of applications for financial assistance from the European regional development fund, with the anticipated levels of assistance from the fund in the three years corporate plan he has agreed with the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Redwood: None. The agency will compete for funds in the normal way.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the bids from the Welsh Development Agency and other non-departmental public bodies he sponsors, and all other bodies eligible for financial assistance from the European regional development fund will be entered for approval and funding under the single programme document for the calendar year 1994.

Mr. Redwood: Applications for the calendar year 1994 have recently been invited from all sponsors, including the Welsh Development Agency and other public bodies mentioned, and these are due to be submitted by 31 March 1995. All bids received will be carefully appraised against agreed selection criteria and in competition with each other and the successful projects will be announced in due course.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to establish an advisory group on sustainable development for Wales in line with those in England and Scotland.

Mr. Redwood: The Government panel on sustainable development provides independent and authoritative advice to all Ministers, including me. Welsh members have also been appointed to the United Kingdom round table and the citizens' environment initiative organising committee. I see no need at this stage for any additional advisory group in Wales to supplement these arrangements.

Secondary School Reorganisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his decision in relation to the proposed amalgamation of secondary schools in Ely will entail all school teaching posts being declared vacant and all post-holders to reapply for jobs.

Mr. Redwood: It is for local education authorities to manage the staffing consequences of their proposals.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce his decision on the proposed reorganisation of secondary education in Ely; if he will give the principle reasons for delay in announcing his decision; what impact the accumulated delay will have on the proposed inspection of Glan Ely high school by Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools on 1 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: As soon as possible. I need to consider carefully and fully a number of statutory objections. It is for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales to decide whether the proposed inspection should go ahead.

Countryside Council For Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which members of staff of the Countryside Council for Wales given early retirement are subsequently being offered remunerated membership of the council.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Countryside Council for Wales will publish its 1995–96 corporate strategy.

Mr. Redwood: The Countryside Council for Wales does not publish a corporate strategy. Each year it prepares a corporate plan and submits it to the Welsh Office as part of the public expenditure review. The document is not published. The council publishes its annual report each autumn.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds from its 1995–96 budget, the Countryside Council for Wales has allocated for new management agreements; and if he will make a statement about the effectiveness of management agreements for sites of special scientific interest protection.

Mr. Redwood: The Countryside Council for Wales has 433 management agreements and I believe it is one of a number of effective protection mechanisms. The council has allocated sufficient funds to maintain the existing agreements but not for new management agreements in 1995–96.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Association of Directors of Social Services, Wales branch in relation to duties on local authorities under section 24 of the Children Act 1989 with respect to those aged 17 years and over and previously in local authority care, with respect to a continuing duty of counselling and advocacy; and what proposals he has for issuing guidelines on interpreting section 24.

Mr. Redwood: This subject has been discussed with the directors of social services in Wales and led to the inspection by the social services inspectorate of services for children leaving care in Clwyd, Powys and South Glamorgan. These were published in 1993. I have no plans to publish additional guidance to that contained in volume 4 in the Children Act series, issued to all social services departments in Wales and which covered this aspect of services.

Council Tax

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the band D council tax for 1995–96 for each local authority in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local authorities in Wales were required to notify the Welsh Office of the level of council tax set for 1995–96 by 16 March. Provisional information is given in the following table. I shall write to my hon. Friend when final figures are available and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Council tax levels 1995–96[1]

Local authorities	£
Alyn and Deeside	403
Colwyn	387
Delyn	401
Glyndwr	383
Rhuddlan	399
Wrexham Maelor	406
Carmarthen	439
Ceredigion	451
Dinefwr	445
Llanelli	495
Preseli Pembrokeshire	427
South Pembrokeshire	416
Blaenau Gwent	343
Islwyn	334
Monmouth	351
Newport	349
Torfaen	354
Aberconwy	400
Arfon	382
Dwyfor	384
Meirionnydd	391
Ynys Mon	399
Cynon Valley	390
Merthyr Tydfil	396
Ogwr	401
Rhondda	400
Rhymney Valley	402
Taff Ely	402
Brecknock	393
Montgomeryshire	377
Radnorshire	378
Cardiff	338
Vale of Glamorgan	353
Lliw of Glamorgan	419
Neath	454
Port Talbot	419
Swansea	435

[1] Provisional. Average band D council tax payable in billing authority area. Figures taken from billing authorities' budget requirement returns. Includes community, county and police precepts.

Medical Secretaries

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines cover the use of national health service medical secretaries during their working hours by private medical consultants at their private consulting rooms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: There are no guidelines issued nationally. It is a matter for employers to instruct their employees on the duties of their jobs.

"People and Prosperity: a Challenge to Wales"

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish a statement follow-up consultation document on training, education and enterprise "People and Prosperity: a Challenge to Wales."

Mr. Redwood: I will publish a follow-up action plan "People and Prosperity: an Agenda for Action in Wales" on Monday 20 March. This sets out the action needed to raise standards, make faster progress towards the national targets for education and training and promote a culture of learning and enterprise.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the expenditure by the Central Office of Information on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* all other advertising and publicity, for each year since 1979, including the estimate for 1994–95 and the budget for 1995–96, expressed in 1994 prices.

Mr. Horam: The Central Office of Information conducts no television advertising, radio advertising, newspaper advertising or any other advertising or publicity on its own behalf.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the expenditure on publicity and public information associated with the citizens charter in each year since 1988; and if he will supply details for each campaign involving expenditures of over £10,000 of *(a)* the nature of the campaign, *(b)* the purpose of the campaign and *(c)* the results of any assessment of the success of the campaign.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Deformed Fish

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what records his Department keeps of the incidence and location of catches of fish with *(a)* skeletal deformities and *(b)* sores and lesions.

Mrs. Browning: No such records are kept.

Dioxin Monitoring

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what monitoring his Department carries out of sea birds, sea mammals, fish or shellfish for dioxin levels; and in what way the results are made available.

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry has an extensive programme for monitoring dioxins in food which includes some samples of fish but not sea birds, sea mammals or shellfish. The results for fish were published in "Food Surveillance Paper No. 31", which is available in the Library. A further survey of sea fish will start later this year and the results will be published in the "Food Safety Information Bulletin."

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non–permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* All recruitment in my Department and its agencies is conducted in accordance with the Civil Service Order in Council 1991. Detailed guidance is given in the civil service management code which is available to all personnel staff.

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The terms of employment of all staff within the Department and its agencies who are on a temporary contract of up to 51 weeks are based on the guidance set out in Treasury general circular No. 375 issued on 30 April 1991.

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* Some casual staff occupy posts at EO level and above, but the vast majority are employed in the clerical and support grades.

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fishers and Food how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration for this year and each of the last five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The total numbers of temporary workers on contracts of up to 51 weeks in my Department and its agencies for the years 1991 to 1995 are as follows:

Percentage of total work force

Year	*Core-MAFF*	*Agencies*	*(Core-MAFF and agencies)*
1991	535	79	5.8
1992	592	84	6.4
1993	847	314	10.2

Percentage of total work force

Year	Core-MAFF	Agencies	(Core-MAFF and agencies)
1994	836	290	9.8
1995	733	310	9.2

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* Staff are employed on temporary contracts for a variety of reasons including to cover unexpected short-term requirements which cannot be forecast three years ahead. Therefore, only broad estimates are possible. My Department expects to employ around 1,000 people on contracts of up to 51 weeks over the next three years. The agencies are expected to employ some 300 such people. No estimates are possible of the number of those employees who would have previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for this year and each of the last five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or (b) less than 51 weeks' duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Waldegrave: The number of members of staff re-employed by my Department and its executive agencies under temporary contracts of up to 51 weeks in the years 1991 to 1995 is as follows:

Year	Core-MAFF	Agencies
1991	7	0
1992	16	41
1993	21	50
1994	28	107
1995	8	57

Brucella Melitensis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of brucella melitensis were reported in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: None, there has never been a case of what is now recognised as brucella melitensis in England.

Milk

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations the Ministry has made to the European Commission on the fiche d'impact produced in relation to Council directive 94/71/EC regarding natural milk, heat-treated milk and milk-based products.

Mr. Jack: The Commission did not produce a fiche d'impact in respect of directive 94/71 which amends and relaxes certain requirements of the milk hygiene directive—92/46. During the negotiations on directive 94/71, the Government pressed successfully for the easing of requirements in respect of somatic cell counts which would have imposed a heavy burden on the UK dairy industry.

Minced Meat

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Commission on the fiche d'impact produced in relation to council directive 94/65/EC, regarding minced meat.

Mrs. Browning: The fiche d'impact with the Commission proposal for the minced meat directive in 1990 did not address industry costs. Despite requests for such information, none was produced. However, during the lengthy negotiations on this directive, the Government pressed consistently and largely successfully for requirements imposing unnecessary burdens on industry to be removed.

Fisheries Protection

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether Spanish warships sent to protect Spanish fishing vessels in the north Atlantic are in any way financed by the EEC or authorised to act on its behalf.

Mr. Jack: Fisheries protection and enforcement in international waters is the responsibility of the flag state. No EU finance is involved in providing fisheries protection.

North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's membership of the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation; whether the United Kingdom is represented at all meetings; and whether in decisions on catches and quotas the British representative gives British views or a view agreed with the EEC.

Mr. Jack: The European Union has been a contracting party to the convention on future multilateral co-operation in the north-west Atlantic fisheries since it came into force on 1 January 1979. The United Kingdom is represented at all NAFO meetings and voices British views and concerns within the EU delegation of which the Commission is the spokesman.

Mr. Philip Corrigan

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what references were obtained from the Australian Government's quarantine and inspection services in respect of Mr. Philip J. Corrigan before his appointment as head of operations of the Ministry's meat hygiene service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Inquiries were made in the usual way about Mr. Corrigan before his appointment, including from his previous employer, the Australian quarantine and inspection service.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Western Sahara

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the United Nations about the movements of Moroccan settlers into the Western Sahara for the purpose of registering for the referendum.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Security Council resolution 907 sets out the criteria which individuals must meet to become eligible to vote in the planned referendum. In particular, prospective voters must be able to show evidence of a link with the Western Sahara extending back to at least 1974. Settlers without such links are therefore excluded from the referendum. It is the responsibility of the UN Identification Commission to ensure that these provisions are complied with.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Turkey as to the application by the Republic of Cyprus for membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We maintain regular contacts with Turkey, both at ministerial and at official level. When I met Mr. Karayalchin, the Turkish Foreign Minister, on 2 February in London, Cyprus was one of several issues raised. Both Mrs. Ciller, the Turkish Prime Minister, and Mr. Karayalchin attended the EE/Turkey Association Council on 6 March. The application of Cyprus and EU membership also featured in those discussions.

Kashmir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last spoke to the Indian Government about human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the human rights situation in Kashmir with the Indian Government during his visit to India in January this year.

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 1994, to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), *Official Report*, column *172*, what were the exact dates of visits to East Timor by diplomatic staff attached to the embassy in Jakarta in 1980, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994; and what factors determine the frequency of visits.

Mr. Goodlad: The information is as follows:

29 October–2 November 1980
26–30 November 1984[1]
12–15 January 1988
13–16 February 1989
7–8 March 1989
8–15 October 1989
12–14 February 1991
24–28 September 1991
14–19 November 1991
28 April–2 May 1992
3–7 March 1993
12–13 May 1993
20–22 May 1993
1–3 November 1993
24–26 January 1994
1–5 August 1994
18–20 September 1994

[1] The month was incorrectly recorded as December in the *Official Report*, column *172*.

A wide range of factors are taken into account in determining the frequency of visits to East Timor.

China

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government propose to take in relation to the imprisonment by the Chinese authorities of Liu Gang, an Amnesty prisoner of conscience.

Mr. Goodlad: During my visit to China last July, a list of prisoners of concern to us was handed over to the Chinese authorities. This list included the case of Liu Gang. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary again raised the list with the Chinese Foreign Minister last September. We will continue to raise Liu Gang's case at every suitable opportunity.

Falkland Islands

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the reasons for the delay in approval being given by the European Commission for the construction of an abattoir at Port Stanley, Falkland Islands to European Union standards.

Mr. David Davis: Approval of the release of Stabex funds for the construction of an abattoir at Stanley, Falkland Islands was held up by administrative problems in the European Commission. After further prompting by Her Majesty's Government the Commission has now approved the release of the funds for this project.

Overseas Premises

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the expenditure on all overseas premises for each year since 1979, broken down to show *(a)* expenditure on the construction or purchase of new premises, *(b)* expenditure on the refitting or upgrading of premises, *(c)* expenditure on the maintenance of existing buildings; and whether he will give details of the (1) location, (2) cost and (3) purpose of, any new premises opened abroad in each of the last five years, and those presently planned for the next five years.

Mr. Goodlad: The information requested is not immediately available. I shall write to the hon. Member with as comprehensive a reply as possible, bearing in mind that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office only became responsible for the overseas estate in 1983, as soon as it has been obtained.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his

Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

Mr. Goodlad: This information will take some time to compile. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Former Prisoners of War

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *509*, what backing Her Majesty's ambassador in Tokyo gave to the case argued by former British prisoners of war of the Japanese when they visited Japan recently to claim compensation for their treatment and that of other Japanese prisoners in the second world war.

Mr. Goodlad: We gave assistance to the former British prisoners of war, through the British embassy in Tokyo, on the lines described in my answer of 14 March. The question of compensation, however, was in our view legally settled by the San Francisco peace treaty of 1951; so we are pursuing a different approach. As agreed between the Prime Minister and his Japanese counterpart in September 1993, we have been examining whether non-governmental measures could help. One such proposal—for a private sector foundation—turned out not to be feasible, but we are discussing with the Japanese Government possible alternatives.

North-west Atlantic Fisheries Dispute

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the terms of the message communicated to the Government of Canada by the Committee of Permanent Representatives in Brussels on 13 March and whether he had been consulted before the message was sent.

Mr. Hurd: COREPER agreed on 13 March that clarificatory discussions should take place between the Commission and Canada in preparation for formal negotiations which could begin when the Canadian authorities had released the Spanish vessel Estai. This was in line with Her Majesty's Government's approach.

Our wider policy on the fisheries dispute between the EU and Canada was outlined in the reply given on 16 March 1995 to the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) by the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), *Official Report*, columns *657–58*. As he said, the United Kingdom has been using its position as a member of both the Commonwealth and the EU to promote solutions to the immediate difficulties and to contribute to an outcome in the longer term which is satisfactory to all.

The Canadian Government yesterday expressed their gratitude for the "very helpful role" which Her Majesty's Government had played in moves towards a resolution of this dispute.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 256**

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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